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Edition de Luxe

Spirite
The Vampire
Arria Marcella

The Quartette
The Mummy's Foot

By

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

Translated and Edited by

PROFESSOR F. C. DE SUMICHRAST

DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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SPIRITE

Introduction

"SPIRITE" is a standing proof of Gautier's versatility, for the subject of the tale is not one that would usually appeal to his intense love of plastic beauty. However, the possibilities of spiritual beauty that must necessarily be expressed in terms of earthly loveliness, and the attraction of the fantastic and the extraordinary, an attraction he could not readily resist, combined to induce him to try his hand at writing a tender, delicate, ideal, and dreamy poem in prose. He succeeded, as the perusal of the story conclusively proves, in creating a very lovely and winsome character, that of Lavinia d'Audefini, the maiden whose confession of love had so often been on her lips in this world, and at last made itself heard from beyond the tomb.

Gautier has admirably rendered the suavity, the chastity of the young girl's unrequited affection.

Engaging herself, she compels the sympathy of the reader, and her charming apparitions are watched for as keenly by him as they were by Guy de Malivert.

It was a very difficult subject to treat, but Gautier proved equal to the task. His touch is delicate, his feeling tender; he has cast aside all thought of the earth and of sensuality; his conception of beauty, which is ever present with him, assumes a loftier and more ideal aspect. He manages to describe supernatural happenings without arousing in the reader's mind any doubt of his own sincerity and belief in the truth of what he relates. Though he was not a believer in religion or the supernatural, he felt the influence of mystery, legend, tradition, the picturesque and the imaginative, and this excursion into the realms of the beyond was a delightful experience to him. He must have been grateful to Swedenborg, whose doctrines he had made himself acquainted with, for furnishing him with such a novel and attractive subject.

He has not borrowed much from the seer. He has adopted his theory of the intercourse between man and the beings in the spiritual world, and has turned it to account in the creation of a dainty and delightful love-story. He accepts his theory of the necessity for man

to repress the carnal side of his own nature and to develop the higher and purer. It is on this that Guy's future happiness is made to depend. But Gautier has not sought, and wisely, to follow the seer in the recondite theories of the nature of God, of Heaven, and of Hell any farther than was needed for the happy ending of his story. Gautier is not at home in the mystic depths of the Infinite, and where Chateaubriand failed, he might well fall short, for he had not the deep faith of the Father of Romanticism.

But he has handled with much skill the various elements that could contribute to the interest of a tale that Parisians were to read in the columns of a daily paper. He has brought in enough of the life of society in his day, enough of the worldliness and the luxury that the *bourgeois* delighted in being familiarized with, to make his circle of readers follow attentively the fortunes of this mystic love affair. He has used his art to paint a delicate portrait of an innocent and pure girl whose heart has been given once and for all to the man of her choice. Indeed his portrait of Lavinia d'Audefini is one of the sweetest he ever drew, and far surpasses in true beauty the richly coloured, but sensuous descriptions of Musidora and Arabella.

Nor is the character of Mme. d'Ymbercourt sacrificed. Of course she had to be subordinated to Spirite; her charms were to be shown inferior to those of the disembodied being, and her beauty had to lack the peculiar attraction that irresistibly drew Guy to Lavinia. She had to be worldly, and to symbolise, to a large extent, the society that had caused Spirite to suffer so bitterly while she remained on earth. But beyond that, Gautier has not depicted her disagreeably; the reader even feels a natural sympathy for the poor woman when she finds herself compelled to give up hopes of marrying Guy and is forced to be content with the empty-headed d'Avricourt. In her case, as in that of the other characters, including even the mysterious Baron de Feroë, there is a noticeable abstention from the exaggeration of which the Romanticists were so regularly guilty. The characters are more human than usual, more genuine, more true to life, even though so much that is supernatural enters into the composition of the tale.

"Spirite" appeared in serial form in the *Moniteur universel*, the opening chapter being published on November 17, 1865, and the concluding one on December 7 of the same year. It was immediately

reprinted in book form, and many successive editions of the tale have since appeared.

" Aria Marcella " is a very different piece of work: it is the evocation of a past age, of a vanished civilisation, such as Hugo had attempted with brilliant literary and artistic success in " Notre-Dame de Paris," and Flaubert was to attempt later in " Hérodiade " and especially in " Salammbô." Mingling with this is the legend of the Vampire, one very wide-spread throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, and traces of which have not altogether disappeared even at the present day. It is, at bottom, the same subject that Gautier had already treated in " la Morte amoureuse," which figures in this collection under the title " The Vampire ; " but in the present tale the idea of the blood-sucking woman who seeks in the veins of her lover the means to renew her youth and conserve her fatal beauty, is subordinate to the restoration of Pompeï in the days of its splendour, just previous to its destruction. The legendary and mystical part of the story is treated but slightly, and as if by way of justifying the representation of the now buried city as it must have existed. It is the reconstitution of the buildings and public edifices, the recalling

of a vanished civilisation, unlike that with which he himself was familiar, it is the delight of putting together his classical recollections and turning his reading to account that has fascinated Gautier in this instance. And it must be owned, even by those who contend that all such restitutions as the one here attempted are but vain and illusory, that the author has managed to give at least a strong aspect of truth and probability to the picture of Pompeï which he has drawn.

He had not the ambition to reproduce exactly the city of old; he knew that it is not in the power of any man to do so, no matter how sound his scholarship, how vast his erudition, how powerful his imagination. He was content to give his readers a notion of what a great Roman city was in the days when Rome was mistress of the world, the centre of letters and art, the metropolis of commerce, and the greatest exponent of luxury and splendour. In this respect he has certainly not failed, and his descriptions add much to the interest of the story.

To the student of Gautier, it possesses the additional charm of exhibiting the working of his mind, of his imagination. The mere sight of the mould of the

lovely breasts of the girl, or woman, who died on that fatal day when Vesuvius sent down the awful shower of ashes under which Pompeï disappeared for centuries, sufficed to excite him to the invention of a tale that has perhaps no probability, but which is undoubtedly dramatic. It is further interesting as presenting a contrast to "Spirite;" the feeling of plastic beauty, as distinguished from the spiritual beauty of the story of Lavinia d'Audefini, is very marked. Indeed, one may say that in "Aria Marcella" Gautier stands again upon his favourite ground and gives free play to that sense of loveliness which, if too exclusively sensual, is none the less a sense of real beauty.

"Aria Marcella" was published on March 1, 1852, in the *Revue de Paris*, having been announced under two different titles — "Pompéia" and "Mammia Marcella." It was republished in *le Pays* in August of the same year, and then appeared in book form, in the volume entitled "Un Trio de Romans," still in 1852. In 1863 it was placed among the "Romans et Contes," in which it has since remained.

Spirite

SPIRITE

A FANTASTIC TALE

I

GUY DE MALIVERT was stretched out, almost resting upon his shoulders, in a very comfortable arm-chair by his fireside, in which blazed a good fire. He appeared to have settled down with the intention of spending at home one of those quiet evenings which fashionable young men occasionally enjoy as a relief from the gaieties of society. His dress, at once comfortable and elegant, consisted of a black-velvet, braided boating-coat, a silk shirt, red-flannel trousers, and morocco slippers, in which his strong, well turned feet were quite at ease. His body freed from any disagreeable pressure, comfortable in his soft and yielding garments, Guy de Malivert, who had enjoyed at home a simple but refined meal, washed down with a few

glasses of claret that had gone to India and back, was in a condition of physical beatitude due to the perfect harmony of his organs. He was happy, though nothing specially fortunate had happened to him.

Near him a lamp, placed in a stand of old crackled celadon, shed through its ground-glass globe a soft, milky light, like moonbeams through a mist. The light fell upon a book which Guy held with careless hand, and which was none else than Longfellow's " Evangeline."

No doubt Guy was admiring the work of the greatest poet young America has yet produced, but he was in that lazy state of mind in which absence of thought is preferable to the finest thought expressed in sublime terms. He had read a few verses, then, without dropping his book, had let his head rest upon the soft upholstering of the arm-chair, covered with a piece of lace, and was enjoying to the full the temporary stoppage of the working of his brain. The warm air of the room enfolded him like a suave caress. All around was rest, comfort, discreet silence, absolute repose. The only sound perceptible was an occasional rush of gas from a log and the ticking of the clock, the pendulum of which rhythmically and softly marked the flight of time.

It was winter; the new-fallen snow deadened the distant roll of carriages, infrequent enough in this peaceful quarter, for Guy lived in one of the quietest streets of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Ten o'clock had just struck, and the lazy fellow was congratulating himself upon not being in evening dress, stuck in a window recess at some ambassadorial ball, with no other prospect than the angular shoulders of some old dowager whose dress was cut too low. Although the temperature of the room was that of a hot-house, it was evident by the brisk burning of the fire and the deep silence in the streets, that it was cold outside. The splendid Angora cat, Malivert's companion on this evening of idlesse, had drawn so close to the fire as to scorch its lovely fur, and but for the gilded fender it would have curled itself up on the hot ashes.

The room in which Guy de Malivert was revelling in such peaceful joy was partly a studio and partly a library. It was a large, high-ceiled room on the top floor of the building, which was situated between a great court and a garden in which grew trees so old as to be worthy of a royal forest, and which are nowadays found only in the aristocratic faubourg; for it takes time to grow a tree, and the new-made rich cannot

improvise them to shade the mansions they build with fortunes that seem to fear bankruptcy.

The walls were hung with tawny-coloured leather, and the ceiling was a maze of old oaken beams, framing in compartments of Norway pine, of the natural colour of the wood. The sober brown tints set off the paintings, sketches, and water-colours hung on the walls of this sort of gallery in which Malivert had collected his art curiosities and fancies. Oak book-shelves, low enough not to interfere with the paintings, formed a wainscotting round the room, broken only by a single door. An observer would have been struck by the contrast offered by the books placed on the shelves: they appeared to be a mingling of the library of an artist and of a scholar. By the side of the classical poets of every age and every country, Homer, Hesiod, Vergil, Dante, Ariosto, Ronsard, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Schiller, Byron, Victor Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, Alfred de Musset, Edgar Poe, stood Creuzer's "Symbolism," Laplace's "Celestial Mechanics," Arago's "Astronomy," Burdach's "Physiology," Humboldt's "Cosmos," the works of Claude Bernard and Berthelot, and others on pure science. Yet Guy de Malivert had no pretensions to scholarship. He knew not much

more than one learns at college, but after he had refreshed his literary education, it seemed to him that he ought not to remain ignorant of all the fine discoveries which are the glory of our age. He had made himself acquainted with them to the best of his ability, and could talk astronomy, cosmogony, electricity, steam, photography, chemistry, micrography, spontaneous generation; he understood these matters, and sometimes astonished his interlocutor by his novel and ingenious remarks.

Such was Guy de Malivert at the age of twenty-eight or twenty-nine. His hair had thinned a little on the brow; he had a pleasant, frank, and open expression; his nose, if not as regular as a Greek nose, was nevertheless handsome, and parted two brown eyes, the glance of which was firm; his mouth, with its somewhat full lips, betokened sympathetic kindliness. His hair, of a rich brown, was massed in thick, close curls that needed not the hair-dresser's irons, and a golden auburn moustache shaded his upper lip. In a word, Malivert was what is called a handsome fellow, and when he had made his entrance into society he had met with many unsought successes. Mothers provided with marriageable daughters were most attentive to

him, for he had an income of forty thousand a year and a sickly multi-millionaire uncle, who had made him his heir. An enviable lot! Yet Guy had not married. He was satisfied with nodding approvingly at the sonatas young ladies performed for his benefit; he politely led his partners to their seats after the waltz, but his conversation with them during the intervals of the dance was confined to such commonplaces as, "It is very hot in this room," — an aphorism from which it was impossible to deduce any matrimonial intentions. It was not that Guy lacked wit; on the contrary, he could have readily found something less commonplace had he not feared to become entangled in the web more tenuous than cobwebs, woven in society round maidens whose marriage portion is small.

If he found himself made too welcome in a house he ceased to call there, or started on a long trip; on his return he noted with satisfaction that he was entirely forgotten. Perhaps it will be supposed that Guy, like many young men of to-day, formed in shady society temporary morganatic unions which enabled him to dispense with a more regular marriage, but it was not so. Without being more of a rigorist than became him at his age, Malivert had no liking for the

made-up beauties who dressed their hair like that of poodles and wore exaggerated crinolines. It was a mere matter of taste. Like everybody else he had had one or two love affairs. Two or three misunderstood women, more or less separated from their husbands, had proclaimed him their ideal, whereunto he had replied, "You are very kind," not daring to tell them that they were in no wise *his* ideal. Malivert was a well-bred young gentleman. A little supernumerary at the Délassements-Comiques, whom he had presented with a few louis and a velvet mantle, had attempted to asphyxiate herself in his honour, but in spite of these stirring adventures, Guy de Malivert, entirely frank towards himself, perceived that having reached the solemn age of twenty-nine, when a young man turns into a mature man, he was ignorant of love, such, at least, as it is depicted in novels, dramas, and poems, and even as described by his companions when in a confidential or a boastful mood. He consoled himself easily for this, however, by reflecting upon the troubles, calamities, and disasters due to that passion, and he patiently awaited the coming of the day when chance would bring to him the woman destined to fix his affections.

Yet, as the world is very apt to dispose of you as best it fancies and as best suits it, it had been decided in the society which Guy de Malivert most frequented, that he was in love with Mme. d'Ymbercourt, a young widow whom he visited very often. Mme. d'Ymbercourt's estates marched with those of Guy; she had about sixty thousand francs a year, and was only twenty-two years of age. She had suitably mourned for M. d'Ymbercourt, a crusty old fellow, and she was now in a position to take a young and handsome husband, of birth and fortune on a par with her own. So the world had married them on its own authority, reflecting that they would have a pleasant home, a neutral ground where people might meet. Mme. d'Ymbercourt tacitly accepted the match and looked upon herself as already somewhat Guy's wife, though he made no haste to declare himself; thinking rather of ceasing his calls upon the young widow, whose airs of anticipated proprietorship palled upon him.

That very evening he was to have taken tea at Mme. d'Ymbercourt's, but laziness had mastered him after dinner. He had felt so comfortable in his own apartments that he had rebelled at the thought of dress-

ing and driving out with the thermometer at ten or twelve above zero, in spite of his having a fur coat, and a hot-water bottle in his carriage. He satisfied himself with the excuse that his horse's shoes had not been sharpened for frost, and that the animal might slip on the frozen snow and hurt himself. Besides, he did not care to keep standing for two or three hours, exposed to the cold north wind in front of a door, a horse that Crémieux, the famous dealer of the Champs-Élysées, had charged him five thousand francs for. From this it will be seen that Guy was not very much in love, and that Mme. d'Ymbercourt would have to await a good deal longer the ceremony that was to enable her to change her name.

As Malivert, feeling sleepy in the warm temperature of the room, in which floated the blue, fragrant smoke of two or three cabanas, the ashes of which filled a small antique Chinese bronze cup on a stand of eagle-wood, placed near him on the table that bore the lamp, — as Malivert was beginning to feel in his eyes the golden dust of sleep, the door opened gently and a servant entered, bearing upon a silver salver a dainty letter, scented and sealed with a seal well known to Guy, for his face immediately clouded. The odour of

musk exhaled by the note seemed also to produce a disagreeable impression upon him. It was a note from Mme. d'Ymbercourt, reminding him of his promise to come and drink a cup of tea with her.

"The devil take her!" he exclaimed most ungallantly, "and her wearisome notes too! Much fun there is in driving across the city merely to drink a cup of hot water in which have been soaked a few leaves coated with Prussian blue and verdigris, while I have here in that lacquered Coromandel caddy caravan tea, genuine tea, still bearing the seal of the Kiatka custom-house, the uttermost Russian post on the Chinese frontier. Most assuredly I shall not go."

His habits of courtesy made him change his mind nevertheless, and he ordered his valet to bring him his clothes; but when he saw the trousers' legs hanging pitifully on the back of the arm-chair, the shirt as stiff and white as a sheet of porcelain, the black coat with its limp sleeves, the patent-leather shoes with their brilliant reflections, the gloves stretched like hands that have been passed through a rolling-mill, he was seized with sudden desperation and plunged fiercely back into his arm-chair.

"I shall stay at home after all, Jack; get my bed ready."

As I have already mentioned, Guy was a well-bred young fellow and kind-hearted besides. Feeling some slight remorse, he hesitated on the threshold of his bedroom, every comfort in which smiled invitingly upon him, and said to himself that ordinary decency required that he should send a few words of apology to Mme. d'Ymbercourt, pleading a headache, important business, an unexpected obstacle, in order to explain, with some show of politeness, his not having called upon her. But Malivert, entirely capable as he was, though not a literary man, of writing a tale or an account of a trip for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, detested writing letters, and especially merely formal, ceremonious notes, such as women dash off by the score on the corner of their toilet-table while their maid is busy attiring them. He would much sooner have wrought out a sonnet with rare and difficult rimes. His incapacity in this respect was complete, and he would walk from one end of Paris to the other rather than scribble a couple of lines. The thought of having to reply to Mme. d'Ymbercourt suggested to him the desperate expedient of going to see her himself. He went to the

window, pulled the curtains aside, and through the damp panes saw the darkness of night, full of densely falling flakes of snow that spotted it like a guinea-hen's back. This led him to think of Grimalkin, shaking off the snow heaped up on his shining harness. He reflected upon the unpleasant passage from his coupé to the vestibule; of the draft in the stairs unchecked by the warmth of the stove, and especially he thought of Mme d'Ymbercourt standing by the mantelpiece, in a very low-necked dress, recalling that character in Dickens that was always known by the name of "The Bosom," and whose white form advertised the wealth of a banker. He saw her superb teeth set off by a fixed smile; her eyebrows, that might have been drawn with Indian ink, so perfectly arched were they, yet that owed nothing to art; her beautiful eyes; her nose, so perfect in shape and modelling that it might have been reproduced as a model in a student's text-book; her figure, which all dressmakers declared perfect; her arms as round as if turned, and laden with over massive bracelets. The remembrance of all these charms that the world had assigned to him, by marrying him, little as he cared for her, to the young widow, filled him with such intense melancholy that he went

to his desk, resolved, in spite of the horror of it, to write ten lines rather than go and drink tea with that lovely woman.

He took out a sheet of paper embossed with a quaintly interlaced "G" and "M," dipped in the ink a fine steel pen in a porcupine holder, and wrote, well down the page in order to have the less to say, the word "Madam." Then he paused, and leaned his cheek on his hand, for his inspiration failed him. He remained for some time thus, his wrist in place, his fingers grasping the pen, and his brain unconsciously filled with thoughts wholly foreign to the subject of his note. Then, as if Malivert's body were tired of waiting for the words that did not come, his hand, nervous and impatient, seemed inclined to fulfil its task without further orders. His fingers extended and contracted as if tracing letters, and Guy was presently much amazed at having written, quite unconsciously, nine or ten lines which he read and which were about as follows:—

"You are beautiful enough and surrounded by lovers enough for me to tell you, without giving you cause for offence, that I do not love you. It is not creditable to my taste that I should make this confession — that is all. Why, then, keep up an

intercourse which must end in linking two souls so little intended to be brought together, and involve them in eternal unhappiness? Forgive me; I am going away, and you will not find it difficult to forget me."

"What is this?" exclaimed Malivert, when he had read his letter over. "Am I crazy or a somnambulist? What a strange note! It is like those drawings of Gavarni's which exhibit at one and the same time in the subscription the real and the expressed thought, the true and the false. Only, in this case the words do tell the truth. My hand, instead of telling the pretty fib I meant it to write, has refused to do so, and, contrary to custom, my real meaning is expressed in my letter."

Guy looked carefully at the note and it struck him that the character of the handwriting was not quite like his usual hand.

"It is an autograph that would be contested by experts," he said, "if my correspondence were worth the trouble. How the devil did this curious transformation take place? I have neither smoked opium nor eaten haschisch, and the two or three glasses of claret I drank cannot have gone to my head. I carry

my liquor better than that. What will become of me if the truth takes to running off my pen without my being aware of it? It is fortunate that I re-read my note, never being quite sure of my spelling in the evening. What would have been the effect of these too truthful lines? And how indignant and amazed would Mme. d'Ymbercourt have been had she read them! After all, it might have been better had the letter gone such as it is. I should have gained the character of being a monster, a tattooed savage, unworthy of wearing a white neck-tie, but at least that wearisome engagement would have been broken off short. If I were superstitious, I might easily see in this a warning from heaven instead of a most improper forgetfulness."

After a pause Guy came to a sudden decision. "I shall go to Mme. d'Ymbercourt, for I am incapable of rewriting the note."

And he dressed in a very bad temper.

As he was about to leave his room, he thought he heard a sigh, but so faint, so soft, so airy that but for the deep silence of night he would not have noticed it.

Malivert stopped short on the threshold of his room, for that sigh affected him as the supernatural affects

the bravest of men. There was nothing very terrifying in the faint, inarticulate, plaintive sound, and yet Guy was more deeply moved than he cared to confess even to himself.

"Nonsense," said he; "it must have been the cat plaining in its sleep." And taking from his valet a fur coat in which he wrapped himself with a skill that testified to long trips in Russia, he descended, very much out of sorts, the steps at the foot of which his carriage awaited him.

II

LEANING back in the corner of his coupé, his feet on the hot-water bottle, his fur coat drawn close round him, Malivert gazed, without noticing them, upon the strange effects of light and shade produced upon the carriage window, slightly obscured by the frost, by the sudden blaze of light from a shop brilliantly lighted with gas and still open, late though the hour was, and at the prospect of the streets dotted with brilliant points of light.

The carriage soon crossed the Pont de la Concorde, under which flowed the dark waters of the Seine in which amid the sombre gleams were reflected the lights of the lamps. As he drove on Malivert could not help recalling the mysterious sigh he had heard or thought he had heard as he left his room. He explained it by means of all the common-sense reasons with which sceptics explain the incomprehensible. No doubt it had been due to the wind in the chimney, to some noise from outside altered by an echo, to the

low vibration of one of the piano-strings responding to the passage of some heavy dray, or after all it was but a sound uttered by his angora cat dreaming by the fireside, as he had at first believed. This was the most probable explanation, the most reasonable. Yet Malivert, while recognising the logical soundness of these views, was inwardly dissatisfied with them; a secret instinct told him that the sigh was not due to any of the causes to which his scientific prudence attributed it; he felt that the soft moan had been uttered by a soul and was no mere vague sound of matter. There was at once breath and grief in it. Whence, then, did it come? Guy dwelt on it with that sort of questioning uneasiness experienced by the strongest minds when they find themselves face to face with the unknown. There had been no one in the room, save Jack, a by no means sentimental person. The softly modulated, harmonious, tender sigh, softer than the soughing of the breeze in the branches of the trembling aspen, was unquestionably feminine — it was impossible to deny it.

Another thing puzzled Malivert — the letter which had, so to speak, written itself, as if a will independent of his own had guided his hand. He could not seri-

ously explain this away, as he had at first endeavoured to do, by attributing it to absent-mindedness. The feelings of the soul are controlled by the mind before they show on the paper; and besides, they do not write themselves down while the mind is elsewhere. Some influence he could not define must have mastered him and acted in his stead while he was dreaming, for now he thought of it he was quite certain he had not fallen asleep even for an instant. He had certainly felt lazy, somnolent, comfortably stupid the whole evening, but at that particular moment he had unquestionably been wide awake. The unpleasant alternative of going to Mme. d'Ymbercourt's or writing her a note of apology had even somewhat feverishly excited him. The lines that expressed his real feelings more accurately and forcibly than he had yet confessed even to himself, were due to an intervention which he felt compelled to consider supernatural until it was explained away by investigation or another name were found for it.

While Guy de Malivert revolved these thoughts in his mind, the carriage was traversing streets more deserted, owing to the frost and snow, than was usual in those rich and fashionable quarters in which the day

does not end until very late in the night. The Place de la Concorde, the rue de Rivoli, the Place Vendôme had been quickly left behind, and the coupé, turning into the boulevard, entered the rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin where lived Mme. d'Ymbercourt.

As he entered the court-yard Guy experienced a disagreeable shock: two files of carriages, the coachmen muffled up in furs, occupied the sanded space in the centre, and the restive horses, shaking their bits, cast the foam from their mouths on to the snow on the ground.

"This is what she calls a quiet, informal evening; tea by the fireside. That is always the way with her. All Paris is here and I have not put on a white tie," grumbled Malivert. "I ought to have gone to bed, but I tried to play the diplomat like Talleyrand, and did not follow my first impulse just because it was the right one."

He slowly ascended the steps, and, after throwing off his fur coat walked up to the drawing-room, the doors of which were opened for him with a sort of obsequious and confidential deference by a lackey, as for one who would soon be the master of the house and in whose service he desired to remain.

"There!" said Guy de Malivert to himself, as he noticed the man's servility was more marked than usual; "the very servants dispose of my liberty and marry me on their own authority to Mme. d'Ymbercourt! Yet the banns have not been published!"

Mme. d'Ymbercourt, on perceiving Guy advancing towards her with rounded back, — the modern way of bowing to ladies, — uttered a slight exclamation of pleasure, which she endeavoured to make up for by assuming an air of coldness and dissatisfaction. But her ever smiling lips, accustomed to exhibit teeth of irreproachable pearliness, could not form the pout called for, and the lady, observing in the mirror that her attempt was a failure, made up her mind to show herself good-natured, like an indulgent woman who knows that nowadays masculine gallantry must not be overtaxed.

"You are very late, Mr. Guy," said she, holding out a hand gloved with such a small glove that it felt like wood when pressed; "no doubt you remained at your club smoking and playing cards. Well, you have been punished for your remissness by not hearing the great German pianist Kreisler play Liszt's 'Chromatic Galop,' and the charming Countess Salva-

rosa sing Desdemona's air better than ever Malibran did."

Guy, in a few well chosen words, expressed the regret, not very deep, to tell the truth, he felt at having missed the galop by the virtuoso and the aria by the society leader, and as he felt rather awkward at having on, among all those people dressed up to the nines, a black-silk tie instead of a white-lawn one, he tried to escape and to gain some less brilliantly lighted spot where his involuntary solecism in dress might more easily be concealed in relative shadow. He had much difficulty in doing so, for Mme. d'Ymbercourt kept recalling him to her side by a glance or a remark that required a reply, brief though Guy strove to make it.

At last, however, he managed to gain the recess of a door leading from the great drawing-room to a smaller one, arranged like a hot-house, with trellises covered with camellias.

Mme. d'Ymbercourt's drawing-room was furnished in white and gold, and hung with crimson Indian damask. The chairs, arm-chairs, and sofas were easy, comfortable, and well upholstered. The chandelier with its gilded branches was filled with tapers in rock-crystal foliage. Lamps, vases, and a tall clock,

all evidently the work of Barbedienne, adorned the white-marble mantelpiece. A handsome carpet, the pile of which was soft and thick like sward, lay under foot. Superb, full curtains draped the windows, and on the wall smiled, even more than the original, a magnificently framed portrait of the Countess painted by Winterhalter.

There was no objection to be made to this drawing-room filled with rare and costly articles, the like of which, however, any one rich enough not to fear the bills of an architect or a house-furnisher, could easily obtain. The commonplace luxury of the room was entirely suitable, but it lacked distinctiveness. Not a single thing indicated the individuality of the owner, and if the Countess had been absent, the room might as well have been that of a banker, a lawyer, or an American making a short stay in the capital. Soul and individuality were wanting. So Guy, naturally artistic, considered the luxury exceedingly vulgar and disagreeable, though it was exactly the background best suited to Mme. d'Ymbercourt, whose beauty was composed merely of commonplace perfections.

In the centre of the room, on a circular divan surmounted by a great China vase in which bloomed a

rare exotic plant, — whose name Mme. d'Ymbercourt had not even the least idea of, and which had been put there by her gardener, — were seated, in dresses of gauze, tulle, lace, satin, and velvet, the swelling folds of which surged to their shoulders, ladies, most of them young and beautiful, whose fancifully extravagant gowns testified to the inexhaustible and costly powers of invention of Worth. On their brown, golden, red, and even powdered hair, so abundant that even the least sarcastic could not help thinking art had been called in to beauty's aid, sparkled diamonds, waved feathers, dewy leaves showed green, natural or imaginary flowers bloomed, strings of sequins rustled, darts, daggers, pins with double balls gleamed bright, ornaments of scarabeus-wings glistened, golden bands were crossed, ribbons of red velvet wound in and out, stars of gems quivered on the end of springs, and in general there could be seen whatever may be piled upon the head of a fashionable woman, — to say nothing of the grapes, the currants, and the brightly coloured berries which Pomona loans to Flora to complete an evening head-dress.

Leaning against the door-post, Guy watched the satiny shoulders covered with rice powder, the necks on

which curled stray threads of hair, the white bosoms occasionally betrayed by the too low epaulet of the bodice, small misfortunes to which a woman sure of her charms easily reconciles herself. Besides, the motion of drawing up the sleeve is uncommonly graceful, and the act of adjusting the opening of the dress on the bosom so that it shall have a satisfactory contour affords opportunities for attractive poses. My hero was indulging in this interesting study, which he preferred to wearisome conversation, for, in his opinion, it was the most profitable thing one could do at a ball or a reception. He glanced with careless eye at these living Books of Beauty, at these animated Keepsakes which society scatters in drawing rooms just as it places stereoscopes, albums, and papers on the tables for the benefit of shy people who do not know which way to turn. He enjoyed his pleasure in greater security because, the report of his approaching marriage with Mme. d'Ymbercourt having gone abroad, he was not obliged to be careful of his glances, formerly closely watched by mothers desirous of settling their daughters in life. Nothing was expected of him now. He had ceased to be a prey. He was settled and done for, and although more than one woman thought to herself

that he might have done better, the fact was accepted. He might even, without running any risk, have spoken two or three phrases running to a young girl, for was he not already as good as married to Mme. d'Ymbercourt ?

At the same door where stood Guy de Malivert stood also a young gentleman whom he often met at his club, and whose somewhat eccentric Northern mode of thought he rather liked. It was the Baron de Feroë, a Swede, a fellow-countryman of Swedenborg's, bending like him over the abyss of mysticism, and as fully taken up with the other world as with this. He had a strange and characteristic head. His fair hair, falling almost straight, was fairer even than his skin, and his moustache was of so pale a gold that it looked like silver. His gray-blue eyes were filled with an indescribable expression, and his glance, usually half veiled by long pale lashes, flamed sharply out and seemed to reach beyond the ken of human vision. But the Baron de Feroë was too thorough a gentleman to affect the least eccentricity ; his manners, cold and even, were as correct as an Englishman's, and he did not pose in front of mirrors as a seer. That evening, as he was going to the Austrian ambassador's ball on

leaving Mme. d'Ymbercourt's reception, he was in full dress, and on the breast of his coat, half concealed by the facing, shone, suspended from a fine golden chain, the stars of the Elephant and of the Dannebrog, the Prussian Order of Merit, the order of Saint Alexander Newsky, and other decorations from Northern sovereigns which testified to his diplomatic services.

He was really an extraordinary man, but the fact did not at once strike the beholder, so well was it concealed by diplomatic phlegm. He went out into society a great deal, and was to be met with at the club, and the Opera, but under his outward appearance of a fashionable man he lived in mysterious fashion. He had neither intimate friends nor companions. In his admirably kept house, no visitor had ever got beyond the outer drawing-room, and the door that led to the other apartments opened to no one. Like the Turks, he devoted to outer life but a single room which he plainly did not live in. Once his visitor was gone, he withdrew within his apartment. What did he busy himself with? No one knew. Occasionally he remained invisible for a considerable time, and those who noted his absence attributed it to a secret mission, or to a trip to Sweden, the home of his

family ; but any one who had happened to pass, at a late hour, through the unfrequented street where lived the Baron, might have seen a light in his window or the Baron himself leaning on the balcony, his gaze lost amid the stars. No one, however, was interested in spying upon Baron de Feroë ; he rendered exactly to society what was society's, and the world asks no more of any man. With women, though scrupulously polite, he never trespassed beyond certain limits, even when he might safely have done so. In spite of his coldness he was considered rather attractive. The classical purity of his features recalled the Greco-Scandinavian work of Thorwaldsen. " He is a frozen Apollo," said of him the lovely Duchess of C., who, if gossip were to be believed, had tried to melt the frost.

Like Malivert, Baron de Feroë was looking at a beautiful snow-white neck and back, seen in a slightly bending attitude, that imparted an exquisite curve to the lines, and which occasionally shivered at the tickling of a spray of green leaves that had become partially detached from the head-dress.

" A lovely girl," said the Baron to Guy, whose glance he had followed. " What a pity she has no

soul. The man who falls in love with her will share the fate of the student Nathaniel, in Hoffmann's tale; he will run the risk of pressing a lay-figure in his arms at the ball, and that is a deathly sort of dance for a man of feeling."

"You need not fear for me, my dear Baron," laughingly replied Guy de Malivert; "I do not feel the least desire to fall in love with the fair owner of these beautiful shoulders, though beautiful shoulders are in themselves nowise to be disdained. At the present time, to my shame be it spoken, I do not feel the faintest approach to love for any one whomsoever."

"What! Not even for Mme. d'Ymbercourt, whom people say you are going to marry?" replied the Baron with an air of ironical incredulity.

"There are people in this world," returned Malivert, quoting Molière, "who would marry the Grand Turk to the Republic of Venice; but for my part I hope I shall remain a bachelor."

"And you will do right," affirmed the Baron, in a tone that passed suddenly from friendly familiarity to mysterious solemnity. "Do not bind yourself with earthly ties. Remain free for the love that will perchance come to you. The spirits are watching over

you, and in the next world you might have cause to regret eternally a mistake committed in this."

As the young Swedish baron uttered these strange words, his steel-blue eyes flashed singularly and his glance seemed to burn into Guy de Malivert's breast. Coming after the curious events of the evening, the advice was received by him with less incredulity than he would have felt the day before. He turned on the Swede a look full of wonder and questioning, as if to beg him to speak more clearly, but de Feroë, glancing at his watch, said, "I shall be late at the Embassy," pressed Malivert's hand earnestly, and made his way to the door without rumpling a single gown, treading upon a single train, damaging a single flounce, with a delicate skill that proved he was well used to society.

"Well, Guy, are you not coming for a cup of tea?" said Mme. d'Ymbercourt, who had at last discovered her supposed admirer leaning thoughtfully against the door of the smaller drawing-room. Malivert had to follow the mistress of the house to the table whereon smoked the tea in a silver urn surrounded with porcelain cups.

The Real was trying to win its prey back from the Ideal.

III

THE singular words spoken by Baron de Feroë and his almost sudden disappearance after he had uttered them gave Guy food for thought as he returned to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, carried along at Grimalkin's fastest trot; for the horse, though a thorough-bred, did not need any urging to speed, the cold north wind making the return to his warm loose-box with its comfortable litter pleasant indeed.

"What can he have meant by his solemn riddles spoken in so mysterious a tone?" thought Guy de Malivert, as Jack assisted him to undress. "De Feroë has been brought up in the least romantic of civilisations; he is sharp, clean, and cutting like an English razor, and his manners, for all their perfect courtesy, are colder than the Arctic. I cannot suppose that he was trifling with me. People do not fail in that way to Guy de Malivert, even when they are as brave as the white-eyebrowed Swede. Besides, what would be the

object of such a joke? He certainly did not stay to enjoy it, for he disappeared at once like a man who is determined to say no more. Well, let me dismiss all this nonsense from my mind. I shall see the Baron at the club to-morrow, and no doubt he will then be more explicit. Let me to bed and try to sleep, whether the spirits are watching me or no."

Guy did go to bed, but sleep did not come to his call, though he courted it by reading the most soporific pamphlets, perusing them with infinite mechanical attention. In spite of himself he was watching for those faint sounds which are perceptible even in the deepest silence. The rattle of the clock ere the hour or the half-hour struck, the crackling of the sparks in the embers, the creaking of the wainscotting under the influence of the heat of the room, the sound of the dropping oil in the lamp, the draft of air attracted by the hearth and moaning softly through the chinks of the door in spite of the weather-strips, the unexpected fall of a newspaper from his bed to the floor,—made him start, as at the sudden explosion of a firearm, so excited were his nerves. His hearing was so tense that he could hear the pulsations of his arteries and the beating of his heart. But amid all these confused murmurs he

did not manage to distinguish anything resembling a sigh.

His eyes, that he closed from time to time in hopes of inducing sleep, would forthwith reopen and examine the recesses of the room with a curiosity not unmixed with apprehension. He strongly desired to see something, and yet dreaded to do so. Occasionally his dilated pupils seemed to perceive dim shapes in the corners, which the light of the lamp, covered with a green shade, left in partial darkness; the folds of the curtains assumed the aspect of feminine garments and appeared to move as though they clothed a living body, but it was all imagination. Blooms, luminous points, changing patterns, butterflies, waving vermiculated lines undulated, danced, swarmed, swelled, and sank before his weary eyes without his being able to make out anything definite.

More agitated than I can express, and feeling, though he neither saw nor heard anything, an unknown presence in his room, he rose, drew on a camel's-hair dressing-gown he had brought back from Cairo, threw two or three logs on the fire, and sat down by the chimney in a great arm-chair more comfortable for a sleepless man than the bed upset by his wakefulness.

Near the arm-chair he saw lying on the carpet a crumpled paper. It was the note he had written to Mme. d'Ymbercourt under the spell of that mysterious impulse which he could not yet account for. He picked it up, smoothed it out, and noticed, on examining it carefully, that the writing was not quite like his own. It seemed to be the work of an impatient hand, incapable of controlling itself, attempting, in the production of a fac-simile, to copy the model exactly, but inserting, among the characters of the original, loops and strokes of its own. The aspect of the writing was more elegant, more slender, and more feminine than Guy's.

As he noted these details, Guy thought of Edgar Poe's "Golden Bug" and of the wonderful skill with which William Legrand manages to decipher the meaning of the cryptogram used by Captain Kidd to indicate enigmatically the exact spot where he had concealed his treasure. He longed to possess the deep intuition which can guess so boldly and so accurately, which fills up blanks and restores connections. But in this case not even Legrand himself, even assisted by Augustus Dupin, of "The Stolen Letter" and "The Murder in the Rue Morgue," could have managed to

guess at the secret power that had controlled Malivert's hand.

Guy, however, at last fell into the heavy, troubled sleep which, on the approach of dawn, follows a night of insomnia. He woke when Jack entered to relight the fire and to assist his master to dress. Guy felt chilly and uncomfortable; he yawned, stretched his limbs, took a cold bath, and, refreshed by his tonic ablutions, was soon himself again. Gray-eyed morn, as Shakespeare hath it, walking, not o'er the dew of a high eastern hill, but down the slope of the snow-covered roofs, glided into the room, the shutters and curtains having been opened by Jack, and restored to every object its real aspect as it drove away the dreams of the night. There is nothing so reassuring as the sunlight, even if it be but the pale beams of a winter sun such as just then streamed in through the frost-flowers on the window-panes.

Having recovered the ordinary feelings of life, Guy felt amazed at his agitation of the past night, and said to himself, "I did not know I was so nervous;" then tore open the wrappers of the newspapers which had just been brought up, cast a glance at the articles they contained, read the news of the town, took up the copy

of "Evangeline" he had been reading the previous evening, smoked a cigar, and having thus whiled away the time until eleven o'clock, dressed, and, by way of exercise, resolved to walk to the Café Bignon, where he proposed to breakfast. The frost of the early morning had hardened the snow fallen during the night, and as he traversed the Tuileries Malivert enjoyed looking at the mythological statues powdered with the white snow, and the great chestnut-trees covered with a silvery mantle. He breakfasted on choice and carefully selected dishes, like a man seeking to repair the fatigue due to a sleepless night, and chatted gaily with pleasant companions, the very flower of Parisian wits and sceptics, who had adopted as a motto the Greek maxim: "Do not forget not to believe." Yet, when the jokes became rather too free, Guy smiled somewhat constrainedly. He did not share unresistingly in the paradoxes of incredulity and the boastfulness of cynicism. The words of Baron de Feroë, "The spirits are watching you," involuntarily recurred to him, and he felt as though a mysterious witness stood close behind him. He rose, waved an adieu to his friends, and took a turn or two on that boulevard along which more wit travels in one day than in a whole year in

the rest of the world, and finding it rather deserted on account of the cold and the early hour, he mechanically turned into the Rue de Chaussée-d'Antin. He was soon at the house of Mme. d'Ymbercourt. As he was about to ring he thought he felt a breath sweep by his ear and that he heard these words whispered very softly but very distinctly: "Do not go in." He turned round quickly, but saw no one.

"What is the matter with me?" said Malivert to himself. "Am I going mad? Am I suffering from hallucinations in broad daylight? Shall I or shall I not obey the injunction?"

But when turning abruptly he had let go the bell-handle; the bell had rung and the door opened. The porter, standing in front of his lodge, looked at Malivert, who hesitated about entering. He did so, however, although he did not feel much like it after the supernatural incident which had just occurred. Mme. d'Ymbercourt received him in the small drawing-room, decorated in buttercup yellow and blue ornaments, in which she received her morning callers. That particular shade of yellow was especially unpleasant to Guy. "Yellow is the favourite colour of brunettes," had replied the Countess to Malivert, who had more

than once allowed himself to ask for the removal of the odious colour.

Mme. d'Ymbercourt wore a skirt of black taffeta with a jacket of brilliant colour braided and covered with more jet and embroidery than a *maja* going to a bull-fight or a *feria* ever put on her bodice. The Countess, although a woman of the world, was foolish enough to allow dressmakers to clothe her in costumes worn only by the rosy-cheeked and small-mouthed dolls of fashion-plates.

Contrary to her habit, Mme. d'Ymbercourt seemed to be serious; a shade of annoyance darkened her usually serene brow, while the corners of her mouth were drawn down. One of her kind friends had just left her and had asked her, with the feigned naturalness of women on such occasions, when her marriage to Guy de Malivert was to take place. The Countess had blushed, stammered, and replied evasively that it would soon come off, though Guy, whom every one destined to be her husband, had never asked for her hand or even formally declared himself, — a fact attributed by Mme. d'Ymbercourt to respectful timidity and partly perhaps to that feeling of uncertainty which every young man experiences when on the

point of giving up bachelor life. But she felt quite sure that he would speak ere long, and she looked upon herself already as his bride; so much so that she had determined upon the changes which the entrance of a husband into her mansion would necessitate. More than once she had said to herself, as she looked at certain rooms: "This shall be Guy's room; this his study, and this his smoking-room."

Although he did not much care for her, Guy could not help acknowledging that Mme. d'Ymbercourt was endowed with regular beauty, enjoyed an umblemished character, and was possessed of a considerable fortune. He had let himself drift, without being particularly attracted, and like all people who are heart-whole, into frequenting this house where he was received more cordially than anywhere else, and he returned to it because, if he were absent for a few days, an engagingly amiable note compelled him to do so.

Besides, there was no reason why he should not return to it. Mme. d'Ymbercourt received the best of society and he occasionally met there friends whom it would not have been quite so convenient to seek out in the busy life of Paris.

"You seem a little out of sorts," said Malivert to the Countess; "did your green tea give you a sleepless night?"

"No, indeed. I put so much cream into it that it loses all its strength. Besides I am the Mithridates of tea; it has ceased to affect me. The truth is, I am annoyed."

"Have I come at the wrong time, or have I upset some of your plans? In that case I hasten to withdraw, and we can take it that finding you were out I left my card at your lodge-gate."

"You are not the least in the way, and you know very well that it is always a pleasure to me to see you," answered the Countess. "Your visits, though I ought not to say it, even seem to me rather infrequent, though others are not of the same opinion."

"Yet you are unencumbered with troublesome relatives, talkative uncles, and chaperon aunts who embroider in the window recess. Kind nature has relieved you of the collection of disagreeable relatives who too often surround a pretty woman, and has left you their inheritances only. You may receive whom you please, for you are not dependent on any one."

"That is true," replied Mme. d'Ymbercourt. "I do not depend on any one, yet I am responsible to every one. A woman is never wholly or really free, even when a widow and apparently mistress of her actions. A whole police force of interested people surrounds and watches her, and interferes in her affairs. So, my dear Guy, you compromise me."

"I?—compromise you?" exclaimed Malivert with sincere surprise, that betokened a modesty quite uncommon in young men not over twenty-eight years of age, who have their clothes made by Renouard and send to England for their trousers. "Why should I compromise you, rather than d'Aversac, Beaumont, Janowski, and de Feroë, each and all of whom are exceedingly attentive to you?"

"That is more than I can tell you," replied the Countess. "Perhaps without knowing it you are a dangerous man, or society has perceived in you some power of which you are yourself ignorant. None of the names you have mentioned have been connected with mine; people seem to think it quite natural that these gentlemen should call on me on my day at home, that they should call every now and then between five and six on their return from the Bois, and should drop

in on me in my box at the Bouffes or the Opera. But these very actions, innocent in themselves, assume, it appears, when performed by you, a tremendous meaning."

"And yet I am the steadiest fellow in the world, and have never given cause for gossip. I do not wear a blue frock coat like Werther, nor a slashed doublet like Don Juan. No one has ever surprised me playing the guitar under a balcony; I never go to the races in a four-in-hand with questionable women in loud dresses, and never, at any evening party, do I discuss sentimental questions in the presence of pretty women for the purpose of drawing attention to the purity and delicacy of my feelings. I am never seen posing against a pillar, one hand in my vest, gazing in silence, with a sombre, woebegone look, at some fair girl with long ringlets, like Alfred de Vigny's Kitty Bell. Nor do I wear hair rings, or a sachet round my neck in which I preserve Parma violets given me by 'her.' My most secret drawers might be searched without a single portrait of a fair or a dark beauty being found in them; nor even a bundle of scented notes tied with ribbon or a rubber band; not even an embroidered slipper, a mask edged with lace, or any of

the trifles which compose the secret collections of lovers. Frankly, do I look like a lady-killer?"

"You are very modest," replied Mme. d'Ymbercourt, "or else you are trying to make out that you are very artless. Unfortunately, everybody does not agree with you. Objection is raised to the attentions you pay me, although for my part I see nothing to object to in them."

"In that case," returned Malivert, "I shall call less frequently. I shall not come more than once a fortnight or once a month, and then I shall start on a trip. But positively I do not know where to go. I have been to Spain, Italy, Russia, Germany. Well, I might go to Greece, for it is considered sinful not to have seen Athens, the Acropolis and the Parthenon. I could go by way of Marseilles or board an Austrian Lloyds' steamer at Trieste. They call at Corfu, and on the way one sees Ithaca *soli occidenti bene objacentem*, basking in the setting sun now as in the days of Homer. They go to the head of the Gulf of Lepanto. Then you cross the Isthmus, and you can see the remains of Corinth, which not every one was allowed to enter. You get on board another steamer and in a few hours you reach the Piræus. Beaumont told me all about it.

He started a fanatical Romanticist, but he got metope on the brain there and will not hear of cathedrals now. He has turned into a confirmed Classicist, and maintains that since the days of the Greeks humanity has gone back to barbarism and that our boasted civilisation is but a form of decadence."

Mme. d'Ymbercourt did not feel particularly flattered by this lyrical outburst of geographical knowledge, and thought Malivert was much too ready to avoid compromising her. She did not desire him to care for her reputation by running away.

"No one wants you to go to Greece," she said. And, with a faint blush and an imperceptible trembling of the voice, "Is there not a simpler way of putting an end to all this gossip than leaving your friends and venturing into a country that is by no means safe, if we are to believe Edmond About's 'King of the Mountains'?"

Fearing lest she had spoken too plainly, the Countess flushed more deeply than before. Her breath came quick and short, and made the jet ornaments on her bodice glitter and rustle; regaining her courage, she looked at Malivert with eyes that a touch of emotion made absolutely beautiful. She loved Guy, her

silent admirer, as much as it was in her nature to love any one. She liked the neat yet careless way in which he tied his cravat, and with the deep logic of women, a logic the deductions of which are often unintelligible to the subtlest of philosophers, she had inferred from that tie that Malivert possessed all the qualities needed in an excellent husband. The trouble was that the intended husband was strolling very slowly indeed towards the altar and seemed in no hurry to light the hymeneal torches.

Guy perfectly understood Mme. d'Ymbercourt's meaning, but he more than ever dreaded uttering imprudent words that might bind him, so he answered: "No doubt, no doubt; a trip breaks off matters completely, and when one returns it is easier to see what should be done."

On hearing this cold and indefinite reply the Countess allowed a gesture of annoyance to escape her, and bit her lips. Guy, very much embarrassed, kept silence, and the situation was becoming unbearable when the footman relieved the strain by announcing Baron de Feroë.

IV

ON seeing the Swedish baron enter, Malivert uttered an irrepressible sigh of content, and cast a look of gratitude at M. de Feroë, for he had never been so glad to see any one. But for this opportune interruption Guy would have found himself in a very embarrassing position. He was bound to answer Mme. d'Ymbercourt plainly, and yet he hated nothing so much as formal explanations; he always preferred to act rather than promise, and even in matters of little moment he was very wary of pledging himself in any way. The glance which Mme. d'Ymbercourt cast upon the visitor was not as kindly as Malivert's, and did not good breeding teach dissimulation, reproach, impatience, and anger might easily have been read in her look. The Baron's unseasonable intrusion deprived her of an opportunity that would not soon recur and that her self-respect would scarcely allow her to bring about, for it was certain that Guy would not seek it, and, indeed would carefully

avoid it. Although on most occasions Guy was a man of resolution and courage, he dreaded any step that might settle his life in any way. He was talented enough to succeed in any career, but he had deliberately avoided making any choice lest it should prove to be the wrong one. He was not known to entertain any attachment for any woman; though the habit he had got into of calling frequently on the Countess had led to the supposition that the pair were thinking of marriage. He mistrusted any kind of bond or obligation, and it seemed as though, urged by a secret instinct, he was trying to keep himself free for some future event.

After having exchanged a few preliminary commonplaces, chords forming a prelude to conversation, like those struck on the piano before beginning a piece, Baron de Feroë, by a transition of the kind that in a couple of sentences make you pass from the fall of Nineveh to the last win of "Gladiator," entered upon an esthetic and transcendental dissertation on Wagner's most abstruse operas,—"The Flying Dutchman," "Lohengrin," "Tristan and Isolde." Mme. d'Ymbercourt, although a remarkable pianist, did not understand music, and especially such deep, mysterious, complex music as Wagner's, whose "Tannhäuser"

gave rise to such fierce discussions in France. While working at a strip of embroidery she had taken from a basket placed near the arm-chair she usually occupied, she replied from time to time to the enthusiastic analyses of the Baron, urging the commonplace objections always brought up against any new form of music, and which were once made to Rossini's compositions as well as to Wagner's, such as lack of rhythm and of melody, obscurity, excessive use of brass instruments, inextricably complicated orchestration, deafening noise, and finally the material impossibility of performing the compositions.

"Your discussion is too deep for me, who am simply an ignoramus in the matter of music. I am moved by what strikes me as beautiful; I admire Beethoven and even Verdi, though it is no longer fashionable to do so, now that one has to be a partisan, as in the days of the rivalry between Gluck and Piccini, when one had to elect to side with the King or with the Queen. So I shall leave you two to fight it out, for I cannot throw any light on the question, and at most I can put in a Hem! Hem! like the Minorite whom Molière and Chapelle chose for arbiter in a discussion on a point in philosophy."

With these words Guy de Malivert rose to take leave and shook hands with Mme. d'Ymbercourt, whose glance said, as plainly as feminine reserve permitted, "Stay," and followed him to the door with a sadness that would no doubt have touched him had he seen it; but Guy's attention was engrossed by the quietly imperious expression of the Swede, which seemed to say: "Do not again expose yourself to the peril from which I have rescued you."

When he found himself in the street, he thought, with some feeling of dread, of the supernatural warning he had received as he was about to enter Mme. d'Ymbercourt's house, and of the call made by Baron de Feroë, a call which coincided in the most singular way with Guy's disregard of the mysterious warning. The Baron seemed to have been sent to his assistance by the occult powers of whose presence around him he was vaguely conscious. Although Guy de Malivert was not systematically incredulous or sceptical, he yet found it hard to bring himself to believe in spirit influences, and he had never indulged in the fantasies of table-turning and spirit-rapping. He felt indeed a sort of repulsion for experiments intended to exploit the marvellous, and he had refused to go to see the famous

Home, whom all Paris went crazy over for a season. Until the previous evening he had led a careless bachelor life, fairly satisfied on the whole with being alive, and feeling that he was cutting by no means a bad figure in the world; thinking of material things only, and not troubling to ascertain whether or not the earth carried with it, in its daily circling round the sun, a world peopled with invisible and impalpable beings. But he was compelled to own to himself that a change had come over his life; that a new element, unsought by him, was seeking to enter into his hitherto peaceful existence, from which he had carefully excluded all possible disturbing causes. So far it was not much: a sigh as soft as the breathing of an Æolian harp, a thought substituted for his own in a letter written mechanically, a word or two whispered in his ear, his meeting with a solemn, mysterious-looking Swedenborgian Baron. It was plain, nevertheless, that a spirit was circling round him *quærens quem devoret*, as the eternal wisdom of the Bible has it.

While thus ruminating Guy de Malivert had reached the great open space in the Champs-Élysées without having in the least intended to go in that direction rather than in any other. His body had borne him thither,

and he had allowed it to have its way. There were not many people there. A few of those obstinate persons who insist — for hygienic reasons — on exercising at all times of the year, and who cut holes in the ice in order to get their bath, were returning from the Bois de Boulogne, their noses blue and their cheeks purple with cold, riding horses with kneecaps. Two or three of them waved a greeting to Guy, and he even received, though he was on foot, a gracious smile from a lady in an open carriage, and wrapped in costly Russian furs.

"As I happen to be the whole of the public, my attention and admiration are worth having," thought Malivert. "In summer I should not have received such a bow. But what am I doing here? This is not the time of year to dine in an arbour with some lively girl, and besides I do not feel particularly gay. All the same the sun is setting behind the Arc de l'Étoile, and it is time to think of satisfying the inner man."

Malivert was right. The great arch of the Triumphal Gate framed in a mass of clouds heaped up in strange fashion, their edges brilliant with a foam of light. The evening breeze, as it set them in motion, imparted to them a sort of life, and it would have been easy to make out figures and groups in the dark mass

of vapours through which flashed the sunbeams, just as in those drawings of Doré's where the fancies that fill the minds of the characters are reflected on the clouds, making the Wandering Jew see Christ toiling up Calvary, and Don Quixote behold knights tilting with enchanters. Malivert thought he saw angels with great wings of flame soaring over a swarming multitude of indistinct beings that moved to and fro on a bank of black clouds, like a sombre promontory jutting out into a phosphorescent sea. Occasionally one of the lower figures broke away from its companions and rose towards the lighted regions, traversing the red disk of the sun. On reaching the higher spheres, it flew for a moment by the side of one of the angels and then melted into the universal glow. No doubt fancy had much to do with the ever changing combinations, and of a cloud picture may be said, in the words of Hamlet to Polonius: "Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel? . . . . Or like a whale?" And in either case one may answer affirmatively, without necessarily being an imbecile courtier.

Night coming on put an end to the vaporous fancifulness, and the gas lamps, as they were lighted, soon traced, from the Place de la Concorde to the Arc de

l'Étoile, the two lines of fire, so magical in effect, which delight the wondering strangers who enter Paris at night by that triumphal avenue. Guy hailed a passing cab, on the look-out for a fare, and had himself driven to the rue de Choiseul, where his club was situated. Leaving his overcoat to the care of the liveried servants in the vestibule, he glanced over the book in which members put down their names for dinner, and noted with satisfaction that it contained Baron de Feroë's. He wrote his own below, traversed the billiard room, where the marker was sadly waiting until it should please some one to indulge in a game, and several other high-ceiled rooms, spacious and furnished with every modern comfort, — the temperature kept at an even warmth by a huge furnace, though great logs blazed on the monumental andirons within the vast fireplaces. Four or five members were idling on the divans, or leaning on the green reading-table and glancing through the papers and reviews, arranged methodically and continually being disarranged. Two or three were writing love letters or business notes on the club stationery.

It was near the dinner hour, and the guests were chatting together until the butler should announce that

the meal was served. Guy began to fear that Baron de Feroë was not coming, but as he passed into the dining-room, the Baron arrived and sat down by him. The dinner, served with a wealth of glass ware and silver plate, was distinctly good, and each man washed it down with his own particular tipple, some with claret, others with champagne, others again with pale ale, according to individual habit or caprice. A few, of English tastes, called for a glass of sherry or port, which tall waiters in knee breeches brought ceremoniously upon silver salvers, marked with the club monogram. Every man drank to his liking, without troubling about his neighbour, for at the club every man is at home.

Contrary to his custom, Guy did not do honour to the dinner. He left the dishes scarcely tasted and the bottle of Château-Margaux in front of him was being very slowly emptied.

"The white angel could not say to you," remarked Baron de Feroë, "as he did one day to Swedenborg, 'You are eating too much,' for you are uncommonly abstemious to-night, and it might be thought that you are trying to attain to the spiritual state by fasting."

"I do not know whether a few mouthfuls more or less would free my soul from its material envelope," answered Guy, "and tend to make more diaphanous the veils that separate the visible from the invisible, but whatever the reason, I do not feel much appetite. Certain circumstances you appear to be acquainted with have, I confess, astonished me somewhat since yesterday and caused me to be more absent-minded than is my wont. Normally I am not usually preoccupied at meals, but to-day other thoughts master me in spite of myself. Have you any engagements this evening, Baron? If you have nothing better to do, I propose that we smoke together after dinner in the music room, where we shall not be disturbed, unless the fancy strikes some of our fellow-members to pound on the piano, — which is not at all likely, for our musical friends are all away to-night at the dress rehearsal of the new opera."

Baron de Feroë courteously agreed to Malivert's suggestion, and politely replied that no better way could be devised of passing the time. So the two gentlemen settled themselves on the couch and started to puff clouds of smoke from excellent cigars of *la Vuelta de Abajo*, each of them mentally thinking of the

curious conversation which could not be put off long. After a few remarks on the quality of the cigars they were smoking, and on the respective merits of strong and mild, the Swedish Baron himself opened the subject that Malivert was dying to enter upon.

" First," he said, " I must apologise for the liberty I took in warning you in mysterious fashion the other evening at Mme. d'Ymbercourt's, for as you had not confided in me it was in a way indiscreet in me to penetrate your thoughts before you had spoken. You may be sure I should not have done so — for it is not my habit to abandon my part as a man of the world and to take up that of wizard — had you not inspired me with a lively interest, and had I not been made aware, by signs perceptible to adepts alone, that you had recently been visited by a spirit, or at least that the invisible world was seeking to enter into relations with you."

Guy hastened to say that he had not been in the least offended by the Baron, and that, indeed, in the novel situation in which he found himself, he was only too glad to have found a guide apparently so well informed in matters supernatural, and whose seriousness of disposition was so well known to him.

"You readily understand," said the Baron, with a slight bow by way of thanks, "that I do not easily break through my reserve, but you have perhaps seen enough no longer to believe that our senses suffice to inform us of everything, and I do not fear, therefore, that you will take me, if our conversation should turn upon such mysterious subjects, for a visionary or one of the *illuminati*. My position is a guarantee that I am not a charlatan and, besides, the world knows my outer life only. I do not ask you to tell me what has happened in your case, but I perceive that in the sphere beyond that of ordinary life an interest is being taken in you."

"Yes," answered Guy de Malivert, "there is something indefinable floating around me, and I do not think I am indiscreet, as far as the spirits, with which you appear to be on an excellent footing, are concerned, if I tell you in detail, what your superhuman intuition has enabled you to divine."

Thereupon Guy related to the Baron the extraordinary events which had marked the previous evening.

The Swedish nobleman, twisting his blond moustache the while, listened to him with extreme attention, but without manifesting the least surprise. He remained silent for a time and seemed buried in thought. Then,

as if the words summed up a series of reflections, he suddenly said to Guy: —

"M. de Malivert, did a young girl ever break her heart on your account?"

"Neither girl nor woman ever did, so far as I am aware at least," replied Malivert. "I am not conceited enough to suppose myself capable of inspiring so great a passion. My love affairs, if a kiss carelessly given and carelessly received, may be dignified by such a name, have been of the most peaceful and least romantic character, and ended as easily as they began. Indeed, in order to avoid pathetic scenes, which I have a horror of, I have always so managed matters as to be betrayed and abandoned, my self-love being very ready to make that sacrifice to my repose of mind. So I fancy I have not left behind me in life many disconsolate Ariadnes; in our Parisian mythology, the arrival of Bacchus invariably precedes the departure of Theseus. Besides, even at the risk of giving you but a poor opinion of my power of loving, I must own that I have never felt for any one that mad, exclusive, all-absorbing passion of which everybody speaks without having experienced it perhaps. No woman has ever inspired me with the desire to

attach her to myself by an indissoluble bond or made me dream of two lives blended into one, or wish to flee with her to that paradise of azure, light, and beauty which love, it is said, can create even in a hut or an attic."

"It does not follow, my dear Guy, that you are unable to feel passionate love. There are many varieties of love, and no doubt, in the place where the fate of souls is settled upon, you have been reserved to higher destinies. But you have still time, for spirits have no power over us save by our free consent. You are standing on the threshold of a boundless, deep, mysterious world, full of illusions and shadows, wherein contend influences for good or evil which a man must learn to distinguish. In that world are to be seen wonders and terrors fit to upset human reason. No one ever returns from its depths without bearing on his brow a pallor that time can never efface; the carnal eye cannot behold with impunity the things reserved for spiritual sight alone; these excursions beyond the material world are paid for by inexpressible fatigue and inspire at the same time desperate nostalgia. Stay your feet at that dread bourne; do not pass from this world into the other, and do not yield to the call

that seeks to draw you beyond the bounds of material life. The enchanter is safe within the circle he traces around him and which the spirits cannot cross. Let reality be to you as that circle; do not overpass it, or you will lose your power. You see that, though I am a hierophant, I do not indulge in proselytism."

"Do you mean," said Malivert, "that I should run the risk of perilous adventures in that invisible world by which we are surrounded, and which reveals its existence to but a small number of privileged beings?"

"By no means," replied the Baron de Feroë. "Nothing that the eye of the flesh can note will happen to you, but your soul may remain for ever deeply troubled."

"Is the spirit, then, which does me the honour to concern itself with me of a dangerous character?"

"It is sympathetic, kindly, and loving. I have met it in the radiance of light. But heaven gives the vertigo as does the abyss. Remember the story of the shepherd that loved a star."

"Yet," replied Malivert, "what you said to me at Mme. d'Ymbercourt's seemed to be a warning against any terrestrial entanglement."

"I was bound to warn you," returned the Baron de

Feroë, "in the event of your answering the manifestations of that spirit, but since you have not as yet done so, you are still your own master. Perhaps it would be best for you to remain in that condition and to lead your old life."

"And marry Mme. d'Ymbercourt," put in Guy de Malivert with an ironical smile.

"Why not?" said the Baron de Feroë. "She is young, beautiful, and loves you; I read in her glance the genuine grief your veiled refusal caused her. She might possibly acquire a soul."

"That is a risk I do not choose to run. Pray do not endeavour, dear Baron, through a kindly feeling which I quite understand, to tie me down to material life. I am more detached from it than may appear at first sight. The fact that I have ordered my days in pleasant and convenient fashion does not involve sensuality on my part. At bottom, comfort is a matter of indifference to me. If I have thought it best to appear careless and joyous rather than to affect a romantic melancholy, which is in very bad taste, it does not follow that the world as I find it delights and satisfies me. It is quite true that I do not maunder, in drawing-rooms, and in presence of an assembly of

pretentious women, about my heart, or the ideal, or the passion of love, but I have kept my soul true and unstained, unspotted by any vulgar love, in the expectation of the coming of the unknown deity."

While Malivert spoke thus, with more earnestness than men of the world usually display, the eyes of Baron de Feroë lighted up and his face assumed an expression of enthusiasm which he generally concealed under a mask of icy indifference.

He was pleased to see that Guy resisted prosaic temptation and maintained his spiritual will.

"Since you have made up your mind, my dear Guy, return home, and you will no doubt receive some new communications. I have to stay; I won a hundred louis yesterday from d'Aversac, and I am going to give him his revenge."

"The rehearsal must be over, for I hear our friends returning and humming, very much out of tune, the airs they have failed to catch."

"Away with you, then; the discord would throw your soul out of harmony."

Guy shook hands with the Baron, and entered his carriage, which was waiting for him at the door of the club-house.

V

GUY DE MALIVERT returned home, his mind made up to run the venture. Though he did not appear to be romantic, nevertheless he was so, but his proud, shy reserve led him to conceal his feelings, and he did not expect of others more than he was willing to give himself. His relations with society were pleasantly indifferent and in no way binding upon him; they were bonds that he could easily cast off at any moment, but it can be readily understood that he dreamed of a happiness which until now he had never experienced.

Acting upon what Baron de Feroë had told him at the club about the need of exercising his will in order to summon the spirits from the vasty deep to the confines of our own world, Malivert concentrated all his powers within himself and mentally formulated his desire to enter into more direct communication with the mysterious spirit that he felt around him and that would not, in all likelihood, prove very restive,

since it had of its own accord attempted to manifest itself.

Having done this, Malivert, who was in the room, half studio, half drawing-room, in which he was sitting at the beginning of this story, applied himself to listen and watch with the utmost attention. At first he neither saw nor heard anything, though the furniture, the statuettes, the pictures, the old carved dressers, the exotic curiosities, the trophies of weapons, struck him as having an unusual and extraordinary aspect, and a sort of fantastic lifelike appearance due to the lights and shadows cast upon them by the lamp. A Chinese grotesque of jade stone seemed to grin to the ears like an old man in his dotage, and a copy of the Venus of Milo, her pointed breasts standing out strongly in the light that fell on them against a dark background, assumed a disdainful look as she swelled her nostrils and drew down the corners of her mouth. Both the Chinese god and the Greek goddess disapproved of Malivert's undertaking, or at least the expression on the two lighted faces might have led him to believe this. Unconsciously Malivert's eyes, as if urged by a mental impulse, turned towards a Venetian mirror suspended on the Cordova leather tapestry.

It was an eighteenth-century mirror, like those commonly seen in Loughi's "Lady at her Toilet" and "Leaving for the Ball," subjects often painted by that decadent Watteau, and like those to be found in the shops of second-hand dealers in the Ghetto. The glass itself was bevelled; the frame was composed of ornaments in cut glass, surmounted by a mass of scrolls and flowers in the same material, which, against the uniform tint of the background, sometimes resembled mat silver, sometimes flashed prismatic rays from their facets. Amid this sparkling and blazing, the glass itself, of small size like all Venetian mirrors, showed of a deep bluish-black, and resembled an opening into a void full of ideal darkness.

Curiously enough, none of the objects opposite the mirror were reflected in it, and it looked like one of the stage mirrors which the scene painter washes over with faint neutral tints to avoid the reflection of the auditorium.

A vague instinct led Malivert to feel that if any revelation was to be made to him, the mirror would prove to be the medium employed. He was fascinated by it, although as a rule he never looked at it, and it attracted his glance irresistibly. Yet, though he gazed

at it intently, he could make out nothing but the black colour, made more intensely mysterious by the cut-glass framework. At last he thought he perceived on its surface a faint, milky whiteness, like a distant trembling light that appeared to be drawing nearer. He turned round to see what article in the room caused this reflection, but saw nothing. Brave though Malivert was, and he had proved his courage on more than one occasion, he felt the hair of his flesh stand up and the fear and trembling of which Job speaks. This time he was about to cross, knowingly and of his own free will, the dread threshold. He was about to step outside the circle which Nature has traced around man. Henceforth he might be thrown out of his orbit and revolve around some unknown point. Unbelievers may laugh at it, yet never was a step fraught with more serious consequences, and Guy fully realised its importance. An irresistible attraction impelled him on, however, and he continued to stare into the Venetian mirror. What was he about to see? Under what form would the spirit present itself so as to become appreciable to his human perception? Would it be a sweet or a terrible figure? Would it cause joy or terror? Although the

luminousness within the glass had not yet assumed any definite form, Guy was convinced that it would prove to be a feminine spirit. It could not be otherwise, he thought, as he recollected the sigh of the evening before that still sounded softly in his heart. Had that spirit belonged to this earth, or had it come from a distant planet or a higher region? That he could not tell. However, judging by what Baron de Feroë had said, he judged that it must be a soul that had lived on earth, and which, drawn by reasons he would probably learn later, was returning to its former abode.

The luminousness in the mirror began to assume a more distinct form and faint colours, immaterial, so to speak, which would have dulled the pigments on the brightest of palettes. It was rather a suggestion of colour than colour itself; a vapour flushed with light and of such delicate tints that human words are incapable of rendering it. Guy stared on, a prey to nervous, intense emotion. The image became plainer and plainer, without, nevertheless, acquiring the hard precision of reality, and Guy de Malivert at last discerned, enclosed within the border of the mirror as within a frame, the head of a young woman, or of a

young girl rather, by the side of whose loveliness earthly beauty was but as a shadow.

A faint, rosy flush gave colour to the head, on which light and shade were scarcely noticeable, and which did not need, as do earthly faces, the contrast of chiaroscuro to bring out the modelling, for it was lighted by another light than ours. The hair, halo-like, softly outlined the brow like a golden vapour. The eyes, half cast down, were of a dark blue, infinitely sweet, recalling the spaces of heaven that at sunset are flushed with violet tints. The fine, small nose was ideally delicate; a smile like that Leonardo da Vinci gives to his female faces, but more tender and less ironical, curved the lips adorably; the willowy neck, bending somewhat under the weight of the head, was bowed forward and blended into a silvery half-tint that might have served for light to another figure.

This slight sketch, necessarily written with words intended to describe earthly things, can give but a most imperfect idea of the apparition that Guy de Malivert beheld in the Venetian mirror. And was it with the eye of the flesh or the eye of the soul that he beheld it? Did the image really exist, and could it have been seen by any one not under the same nervous influence as

Guy? That is a difficult question to answer. This much may be said, that what he saw, though it was *like* the face of a beautiful woman, in no respect *resembled* what, on this earth, is called a beautiful female face. The features were similar, but they were purer, transfigured, idealised, and rendered perceptible by an immaterial substance, so to speak, only just dense enough to be visible in the gross earthly atmosphere by eyes not yet freed from the veils that covered them. No doubt the spirit or the soul that was entering into communication with Guy de Malivert had borrowed the form of its former perishable body, but such as it must have become in a more subtile, more ethereal region where the ghosts of things alone and not things themselves can exist. The vision was an ineffable delight to Guy; the feeling of fear which he had experienced at first had vanished, and he gave himself up unreservedly to the strangeness of the situation, discussing nothing, admitting everything and resolved to think the supernatural natural. He drew nearer the mirror, in the hope of noting the features more clearly; the image remained as it had at first appeared to him, very close and yet very distant, resembling the projection, upon the inner surface of a crystal, of a figure placed at a

distance beyond the power of man to measure. The reality of what he saw, if the expression may be allowed in this connection, was evidently elsewhere, in deep, distant, mysterious regions inaccessible to mortals, on the outskirts of which even the boldest thinker scarce dares venture. In vain did Guy try to connect the face with some of his earthly memories; it was wholly new to him, and yet he seemed to recognise it. Where had he seen it? Assuredly not in this sublunar, terraqueous world.

This, then, was the form under which *Spirite* desired to show herself. Malivert seeking for a name by which to call to himself the apparition he had beheld in the mirror, had given her this appellation until he could ascertain what name would suit her better. Presently it seemed to him that the image was growing fainter and vanishing within the depths of the mirror. It now showed only as the light vapour of a breath, and even that vapour disappeared in its turn. The passing of the vision was marked by the sudden reflection of a gilded frame suspended on the wall opposite the mirror, which had regained its usual power of reflection.

When he could no longer doubt that the apparition would not return, on that evening at least, Guy threw

himself into an arm-chair, and although the clock had just struck two in the morning, its silvery sound advising him to retire, he could not make up his mind to go to bed. He felt fatigued, it is true; the novel emotions, the first step into an unknown world had brought on the wakeful fatigue that prevents sleep. Besides, he feared to miss another manifestation of Spirite if he should fall asleep.

His feet stretched out on the fender before the fire that had burned up again of itself, Guy thought over the events that had just taken place and the very possibility of which he would have denied a couple of days before. He thought of the lovely head recalling, as if to cause them to be forgotten like vain shadows, the beauties revealed in dreams by the imagination of poets or the genius of painters. He discovered in it infinite, inexpressible suavity, innumerable charms that neither nature nor art could unite in one and the same face and he augured well, from the sample he had beheld, of the looks of the inhabitants of the world beyond. Then he asked himself by what strange sympathy, by what mysterious and hitherto unconfessed affinity that angel, that sylph, that soul, that spirit, of the nature of which he was as yet ignorant,

and which he was unable to connect with any immaterial order, could have been drawn towards him from the infinite depths. He dared not flatter himself with having inspired love in a being of a higher nature, for conceit was no trait of Malivert, yet he could not help owning that Spirite seemed to experience for him, Guy de Malivert, a mere mortal, a sentiment entirely feminine in its character and that in this world would have been called jealousy. The sigh she had uttered, the letter of which she had changed the wording, the warning whispered at Mme. d'Ymbercourt's door, and the remark suggested by her, no doubt, to the Swedish baron proved it. What Guy did understand quite plainly and at once was that he himself was madly, desperately, hopelessly in love ; a prey all of a sudden to a passion that eternity itself could not satiate.

From that moment every woman he had ever known was totally forgotten by him. On the appearance of Spirite, he had forgotten earthly loves, just as Romeo forgot Rosalind when he beheld Juliet. Had he been Don Juan in person, the three thousand lovely names would have vanished of themselves from his book. He did experience a sense of terror on feeling himself a prey to that sudden flame that swept away

thought, will, and resistance and left nothing alive in his soul but passion. It was too late, however, and he no longer belonged to himself. Baron de Feroë was right, and Guy had found how dangerous it is for a mortal man to overstep the bounds of life and to venture, in material form, among the spirits if he bears not the golden branch to which all spirits bow.

A fearful thought occurred to Malivert. How was he to bring Spirite back if she did not choose to reappear? If there were no means of doing so, how would he be able to bear with the darkness of the sun after having contemplated real light for a moment? He was filled with a sense of utter misfortune and sank into deep despondency; he passed through an instant, as long as eternity itself, of hideous despair. The mere possibility, unconfirmed by any indication of its truth, brought the tears to his eyes, and try as he might to restrain them, ashamed as he felt at the exhibition of such weakness, they overflowed and slowly rolled down his cheeks. As he wept, he felt, with delight and surprise, a veil more tenuous than the finest of stuffs, like woven air, being passed over his face, absorbing, drying in its caress the bitter drops he had shed. The touch of a butterfly's wing could not

have been softer, yet it was no illusion, for he thrice felt it, and when his tears had been dried, Malivert thought he perceived a diaphanous white flake vanishing in the shadows, like a cloudlet in the heavens.

This attentive and tender sympathy convinced Malivert that Spirite, who seemed to be ever fluttering around him, would answer his call and find, thanks to her higher intelligence as a superior being, the means of communicating easily with him. Spirite could enter the world in which he lived, to the extent, at least, that a soul can mingle with the living, while he, a mortal, was prevented from following her within the ideal region in which she moved, by the obstacle of his carnal body. It will surprise no one that Malivert passed from the deepest despair to the truest joy. If a mere mortal woman can ten times in the course of one day plunge you into the lowest depths or transport you to the highest heavens, inspire you with the desire of blowing your brains out or of purchasing on the shores of Lake Como a villa in which to shelter your loves forever, it may easily be understood that the feelings awakened by a spirit are infinitely deeper.

Guy's love for Spirite may, it is true, appear rather sudden, but it should be remembered that love is often

called out by a single glance, and that a woman seen through a pair of opera glasses at the theatre does not differ very greatly from the reflection of a soul seen in a mirror; that many serious cases of passionate love have begun in a manner precisely similar, and that besides, though he himself was not aware of the fact, Guy's love was far less sudden than it seemed to be. Spirite had for a long time been haunting him, preparing his unconscious soul for supernatural communications, suggesting to him, in the midst of his worldly frivolity, thoughts deeper than vain appearances, inspiring him with the nostalgia of the ideal by vague remembrances of higher spheres, drawing him away from idle loves, and making him foresee a happiness that earth could not give. She it was who had broken the threads spun around Guy; who had torn away the webs in which he was to be caught; who had shown him the ridiculous side or the perfidy of a mistress of a day, and until now had kept him free from any lasting tie. She had stopped him on the very brink of the irrevocable, for, though nothing had happened to Guy that was appreciably significant from the human point of view, he had come to a crucial point in his life; his fate was hanging in the mysterious scales:

this it was that had made Spirite resolve to issue from the shadow in which her occult protection of him was concealed, and to reveal herself to him, since he could no longer be directed by secret influences alone. Why did she interest herself thus in him? Did she yield to an impulse of her own, or did she obey an order emanating from that radiant sphere where, as Dante says, one *can* what one *wills?* She alone could tell, and the time was perhaps near when she would do so.

Malivert at last went to bed and soon fell asleep. His slumbers were light, bright, and full of a wondrous brilliancy that resembled visions rather than dreams. Vast azure spaces, in which the long trails of light formed endless perspectives of silvern and golden vales, opened before his closed eyes; then the picture would vanish, leaving visible in even greater depths streams of blinding phosphoresence, like unto a cascade of molten suns falling from eternity into the infinite; in its turn the cascade disappeared, and in its place was outspread a heaven of that intense, luminous whiteness that of yore clothed the three transfigured figures on Mount Tabor. From its depths, that seemed the very paroxysm of splendour, flashed here and there bursts of stars, brighter gleams, still more

vivid scintillations. There was in that light, against which the most brilliant stars would have shown black, something like the swelling and surging of an incessant *becoming*. From time to time, as pass birds across the sun's disk, sped across that vast irradiation spirits visible, not through the shadow they cast, but through a different kind of light. Among them Guy thought he recognised Spirite; nor was he mistaken, though she seemed to be but a brilliant point in space, but a globule in the incandescent brightness. Spirite had desired to show herself to her lover, by means of the dream she evoked, in her real home. The soul, freed during the hours of sleep from the bonds of the flesh, lent itself to the vision, and for a few moments Guy was enabled to see with the inner sight, not the outer world itself, the contemplation of which is permitted only to souls wholly freed, but a ray filtering under the imperfectly closed door of the unknown, as from a darkened street one sees under the door of a palace lighted within a beam of brilliant light that suggests the splendour of the feast.

Spirite, not wishing to fatigue Guy's yet too human organ, dispelled the visions, and wafted him from ecstasy into ordinary sleep. He felt, as he fell back into

the night of common dreams, that he was being caught, as though he were a shell-fish, in a matrix of black marble, in a darkness of deepest intensity. Then all passed away, even that sensation, and for two hours Guy rested in the non-existence whence life arises more youthful and refreshed.

He slept until ten in the morning, and Jack, who had been awaiting his awakening, seeing that his eyes were fully opened, pushed open the door that he had held ajar, entered the room, drew back the window curtains, and directing his steps towards Malivert's bed, handed him on a silver salver two letters that had just been delivered. The one was from Mme. d'Ymbercourt, the other from Baron de Feroë. It was the latter that Guy opened first.

VI

THE Baron's note contained these words merely: "Has Cæsar crossed the Rubicon?" Mme. d'Ymbercourt's, much less brief, insinuated, in cleverly turned phrases, that indefinite gossip should not be taken seriously, and that to break off suddenly visits that had become habitual would perhaps be more compromising than to make them more frequent. The note closed with a remark about Adelina Patti, the purpose of which appeared to be that a seat would be kept for him in box 22 at the Opera. Guy certainly admired the young diva greatly, but in his present state of mind he preferred to hear her some other evening, and determined he would find a way to avoid the appointment.

The human mind has a tendency to doubt that extraordinary events have taken place when the environment in which these have occurred has resumed its normal appearance. So Malivert, on looking into the Venetian mirror by daylight, asked himself, as he

gazed at its silvery surface framed in by the cut-glass border, and as he saw in it the reflection of his own face only, whether it was true that that piece of polished glass had actually shown him, only a few hours since, the loveliest face the eye of man had ever beheld. In vain did his reason attempt to explain the celestial vision as the effect of a dream, of a vain fancy, — his heart gave his reason the lie. Difficult as it is to appreciate the reality of the supernatural, he felt that it was all true and that behind the outwardly calm appearances surged a whole world of mystery. Yet nothing was changed in the apartment, and a visitor would not have noticed anything peculiar in it; as far as Guy was concerned, however, the door of every dresser, of every cupboard, might prove to be one opening into the infinite. The least noises, which he took for warnings, made him start.

In order to get rid of his nervous condition of excitement, he resolved to take a long drive. He had a fancy that Spirite would appear at night only; besides, if she wished to communicate with him, her fantastic ubiquity enabled her to find him and to manifest herself to him wherever he might be. In this affair, if such vague, frail, aerial, impalpable relations may be called

an affair, Malivert's rôle was necessarily passive. His ideal mistress could enter his world at any time she chose, but he was unable to follow her in the mysterious spaces wherein she dwelt.

It had been snowing two nights before, and, a rare thing in Paris, the white carpet had not melted, under the influence of a soft wind, into that cold slush worse even than the black slush of the old pavements or the yellow mud of the new asphalt. It had been hardened by a sharp frost and crunched under the foot like crushed glass under carriage wheels. Grimalkin was a capital trotter, and Malivert had brought back from Saint Petersburg a sleigh and a complete set of Russian harness. Opportunities of enjoying sleighing are infrequent in our temperate climate, and sportsmen seize on them with avidity. Guy was very proud of his sleigh, unquestionably the best turned-out in Paris, and which might have figured advantageously in the races on the Neva Place. He rather enjoyed the idea of a rapid drive in the bracing icy air. He had learned, during the winter he had spent in Russia, to enjoy the arctic delights of snow and cold; he loved to glide over the white carpet scarce rayed by the steel of the skates, driving a fast horse with both hands, like an izvostchick.

He had the sleigh brought round, and soon reached the Place de la Concorde and the Champs-Élysées. The road had not been cared for and improved as on the Neva Place, but the snow was deep enough to allow the sleigh to glide along without bumping too much. A Parisian winter cannot be expected to be as perfect as a Russian one. At the Bois de Boulogne he might have thought he was in the Islands, so even and white did the snow lie, especially in the side drives where fewer horsemen and carriages are met with. Guy de Malivert turned down a road leading through a wood of firs, the dark limbs of which, laden with snow that the wind had not shaken off, recalled to him his drives in Russia. He had plenty of furs, and the northern blast seemed to him but a zephyr by comparison with the cold gales he had faced in that country.

The approaches to the lake were crowded, and the number of carriages as large as on fine days in autumn or spring, when all sorts and conditions of men are attracted to Longchamp by the races in which figure celebrities of the turf. In carriages hung on easy springs were to be seen ladies belonging to the great world, warmly covered with huge bear-skin robes edged with scarlet, and pressing against their fur-

lined satin cloaks warm zibeline sable muffs. On the box-seats, covered with heavily embroidered hammer-cloths, coachmen of great houses, seated majestically, their shoulders protected by fur capes, looked as disdainfully as did their mistresses, at the women not in society who were driving themselves in extravagant and pretentious vehicles drawn by ponies. There were also numerous closed carriages, for the idea of driving in an open carriage with the thermometer only twelve or thirteen degrees above zero, strikes Parisians as far too arctic. A certain number of sleighs were to be seen among the many wheeled carriages, for the snow had evidently not been anticipated; Malivert's sleigh, however, easily surpassed all others. Some Russian noblemen, idling around, as happy as reindeer in snow, condescended to approve of the elegant curves of the *douga* and of the correct way in which the harness straps were fastened to it.

It was about three o'clock; the lower portion of the sky was veiled by a soft haze, and against the delicate gray background stood out the slender twigs of the leafless trees which, with their slender branches stripped of foliage, looked like skeleton leaves. A rayless sun, resembling a great red seal, was sinking

through the haze. The lake was covered with skaters, three or four days of frost having made the ice thick enough to bear the weight of the crowd. The snow, swept off the surface and heaped up on the edges of the shore, showed the dark, polished surface rayed in every direction by the blades of the skates, like the mirrors in restaurants on which lovers scratch their names with a diamond. On the banks stood people hiring skates to *bourgeois* amateurs, whose tumbles formed the comic intermedes of the winter festival, like the ballet in the *Prophète* on a large scale. In the centre of the lake the more famous skaters, dressed in neat costumes, indulged in fancy feats. They flew like the wind, swung abruptly around, avoided collisions, stopped short by digging in the heel of their skates, cut curves, grapevines, figures of eight, letters, like Arab horsemen who, with the rowels of their spurs, write the name of Allah on the flanks of their steeds. Others pushed around, in light hand-sledges quaintly ornamented, handsome ladies wrapped in furs, who leaned back and smiled at them, excited by the speed and the cold air. Some guided by the hand elegant young women, wearing Russian or Hungarian fur caps, jackets frogged and braided, and trimmed

with blue fox, bright-coloured skirts, looped up with clasps, and pretty patent-leather boots, crossed, like cothurns, by the straps of the skates. Others again, racing each other, flew along on one foot, heading forward like the Hippomenes and the Atalanta under the chestnut trees in one of the parterres of the Tuileries. The best way to win the race, now as formerly, might well have been to drop in front of these Atalantas dressed by Worth a golden apple or two; but there were those among them of such rank that even a diamond brooch would not have stopped them for an instant. The constant passing and repassing of so many people dressed with such strange elegance and rich originality, making a sort of fancy-dress ball on the ice, formed a graceful, charming, animated spectacle worthy of the brush of Watteau, Lancret, or Baron. Some of the groups recalled the paintings placed above the doors in old châteaux representing the Four Seasons, and in which Winter is personified by gallants pushing, in swan-necked sledges, marchionesses wearing velvet masks, who turn their fur muffs into receptacles for love letters. In the present case, it is true, the pretty faces, made rosier by the cold, lacked the masks, but the veils embroidered with steel

beads or fringed with jet made a fair substitute for them.

Malivert pulled up by the lake shore, and watched the entertaining and picturesque scene, the chief performers in which he was acquainted with. He was enough of a society man to follow the loves, intrigues, and flirtations that agitated the select few whom one soon learns to distinguish from the vulgar herd, the troop of supernumeraries that surrounds, without understanding it, every performance, and whose use is to prevent the action from standing out too clearly and too bare. But he looked on without any interest in the scene, and he even saw pass by a very charming lady, who had formerly favoured him, and who was now leaning in loving, familiar fashion upon the arm of a handsome skater, without feeling the least trace of jealousy.

Grimalkin was impatiently pawing the snow-covered ground, and presently Guy gave him his head, turned in the direction of the city and drove along the Lake Avenue, up and down which carriages were constantly coming and going, to the great delight of the foot passengers who appeared to enjoy seeing for the tenth or twelfth time in the course of an hour the

same yellow-bodied coach with a solemn dowager in it, and the same little dark-green coupé, with a Havana poodle at the window, and inside a light o' love with her hair dressed like a poodle's coat.

Guy, as he drove homewards, checked the speed of his horse, to avoid running over any one in the crowded road; and besides, it is not good form to drive fast on that fashionable thoroughfare. He saw advancing in his direction a carriage he would rather not have met. Mme. d'Ymbercourt was a chilly person, and Guy had not supposed that she would come out in such cold weather, which merely went to show how little he knew women; for no known cold would keep a woman from going to a fashionable drive and showing herself where she should do so. Now, in that particular winter, the correct thing was to go to the Bois de Boulogne, and to take a turn on the frozen lake, the meeting-place, between three and five in the afternoon, of all the celebrities, in one way or another, that *tout Paris* can manage to collect in one spot. A woman of any standing would never forgive herself did her name fail to appear among those of the beauties of the day in the columns of some well-informed newspaper. Now Mme. d'Ymbercourt was beautiful

enough, rich enough, and fashionable enough, to consider herself bound to conform to the requirements of fashion, and therefore, though shivering a little under the furs in which she was wrapped up, she was performing her pilgrimage to the lake. Malivert was tempted to let Grimalkin, who would not have objected, swing into his fastest trot, but Mme. d'Ymbercourt had caught sight of him and he was forced to drive alongside her carriage.

He chatted on various indifferent subjects, in an uninterested way, putting forward as a pretext for not accepting her invitation to the Opera that he had to go to a dinner, when a sleigh passed so close as almost to touch his own. This sleigh was drawn by a superb horse of the Orloff breed; it was iron gray, with a white mane and a tail every hair in which gleamed like silver. Held in by a Russian coachman with a long beard, green cloth caftan and fur-bordered velvet cap, the horse champed its bit and stepped along throwing up its head and occasionally touching his knees with it. The beauty of the equipage, the correct get-up of the coachman, the handsome horse attracted Guy's attention, but great was his amazement when in the lady seated in the sleigh, and whom he had at first assumed

to be one of those Russian princesses that come to Paris for a season or two to dazzle the capital by their eccentric display of wealth — supposing that Paris can be dazzled by anything — he recognised, or thought he recognised, a likeness to a face he had had but a glimpse of, but which was now forever ineffaceably imprinted on his memory, though he certainly did not expect to meet with it in the Bois de Boulogne, after having seen it appear, as Helen to Faust, in a sort of magic mirror. At the sight of her he started so suddenly that Grimalkin, feeling the nervous thrill, plunged forward. Guy, casting a word of apology to Mme. d'Ymbercourt to the effect that he could not hold in his horse, followed the sleigh, which increased its pace.

As if surprised at being followed, the lady looked half round to see who was so bold as to do so, and although she showed only a small portion of her profile, Guy made out under the black net-veiling wavy golden hair, deep blue eyes, and an ideal complexion, such as the snow on lofty mountain-tops, flushed by the beams of the setting sun, can alone give any idea of. She wore turquoise earrings, and on the part of the neck showing between the collar of her fur pelisse and her hat, curled a stray lock of hair, light as down and fine

as a child's hair. It was, indeed, the face that had appeared to him the night before, with the added reality needed by a phantom in broad daylight and close to the lake in the Bois de Boulogne. How did Spirite happen to be there in so charmingly human a form, visible, no doubt, to others as well as to himself? for it was difficult to admit that, even were the apparition itself impalpable, the coachman, the horse, and the sleigh were likewise unsubstantial shadows. Guy did not waste his time trying to solve the problem, for, in order to make sure that he had not been deceived by a likeness of the sort that disappears when it is examined closely, he endeavoured to pass the sleigh so as to have a good look at the mysterious face. He allowed Grimalkin to step out at his best gait, whereat the good horse went off like an arrow, his breath, for a few moments, steaming upon the back of the sleigh Guy was pursuing. Nevertheless, although Grimalkin was a very fast horse, he was no match for the Russian stepper, perhaps the finest of his breed that Malivert had ever seen. The caftan-clad coachman clicked his tongue, and the iron gray in a few bounds put space sufficient between the two sleighs to reassure his mistress, if she happened to be disturbed by the proximity of Guy.

No doubt the object of the lady who bore such a startling resemblance to Spirite was not to discourage Malivert's pursuit, for her sleigh was again driven at a more moderate pace. The race had taken the pair into the Fir Avenue, at this moment empty of carriages, and the chase settled down in earnest. Yet Grimalkin did not once manage to get alongside of the Orloff stepper; the best he could do was to prevent the distance between the sleighs from increasing. The hoofs of the horses sent lumps of white snow flying against the dash-boards, where they broke into frosty dust, and the two noble animals were enveloped in clouds of steam as in classic clouds. For one moment, at the end of the drive, barred by the file of carriages driving down the main avenue, the two sleighs were side by side, and Guy was enabled to see for a second or two the face of the supposed Russian lady, whose veil was blown aside by the wind. A celestially arch smile played upon her lips, the curve of which recalled that of Mona Lisa's. Her eyes were starry and blue like sapphires, and a rosier flush warmed her velvety cheeks. Spirite, for it was she, drew down her veil, the coachman urged on his horse, and the animal dashed forward furiously. A cry of terror escaped

Guy, for at that very instant a carriage was crossing the drive, and, forgetting that Spirite, as a disembodied spirit, was safe from all earthly accidents, he looked for a dreadful collision; but the horse, the coachman, and the sleigh passed through the carriage as through a mist, and were speedily out of Malivert's sight. Grimalkin seemed terrified; nervous shudders ran all over his limbs, usually so firm, as if he were puzzled by the disappearance of the sleigh. Animals have wonderfully deep instinct, and often see what escapes man's careless glance. Many of them seem endowed with a sense of the supernatural. But Grimalkin soon calmed down on joining the procession of undoubted carriages along the lake shore.

As he drove down the Avenue de l'Impératrice, Guy met Baron de Feroë who was also returning from the Bois in a light drojky. After asking Malivert for a light for his cigar, the Baron said to him, half mysteriously, half quizzically: "Mme. d'Ymbercourt will not be very well pleased, and you will be scolded in rare fashion at the Opera to-night, if you are imprudent enough to go. I fancy that sleigh-race can scarcely have been to her taste. Meanwhile you had better tell Jack to throw a blanket over

Grimalkin, if you do not want him to catch his death of cold."

Guy was past being amazed at strange things. It had not appeared to him at all out of the way that a sleigh should pass through a carriage. This facility in traversing obstacles against which terrestrial vehicles would have been smashed showed that it was indeed a mysterious equipage come from the spheres of the impossible, and which could contain Spirite only. Unquestionably Spirite was jealous, or at least — for all her actions proved it — she desired to keep Malivert and Mme. d'Ymbercourt apart; and evidently she had gone about doing so in the right way, for as he turned into the open space of the Arc de l'Étoile, Guy saw the Countess in her carriage appearing to listen very attentively to the doubtless gallant conversation of M. d'Aversac, who was bending elegantly over his horse's withers as he walked it by her side.

"That is to pay me for the sleigh," said Malivert to himself; "but I am not the kind of fellow to be egged on in that way. D'Aversac is a sham clever fellow, just as Mme. d'Ymbercourt is a sham beauty They are an excellent match for each other. I can judge them in the most disinterested fashion, since

affairs of this sort have ceased to concern me. They will be a well assorted pair, as the song says."

Such was the net result of Mme. d'Ymbercourt's manœuvres. On perceiving Guy she had bent forward, perhaps a little more than was proper, to reply to the sweet sayings of M. d'Aversac. The poor woman thought she might recall her lukewarm adorer by touching his self-love. She had had a glimpse of Spirite, and she had guessed that she had a formidable rival in her. The eagerness displayed by Guy, usually so cool, in pursuing the mysterious sleigh and the woman whom no one had ever met at the Bois, had stung her to the quick, for she had easily seen through the excuse so hurriedly given, and did not believe that Grimalkin had run away. D'Aversac, who was swelling with satisfaction, for he was not in the habit of being so well treated, modestly attributed to his own merit what he would have been wiser to ascribe to feminine annoyance. He even magnanimously pitied poor Malivert, who had reckoned too surely on possessing Mme. d'Ymbercourt's affections. All the projects which the gentleman's conceit, helped by appearances, immediately proceeded to build up on this slight event, may easily be imagined.

On that day Guy was engaged to dinner to people with whom it would be difficult to fail in keeping an appointment made long before. Fortunately there were many guests, and his absentmindedness was not noticed. The dinner over, he exchanged a few words with the mistress of the house, and having thus sufficiently made plain that he had come, he performed a masterly retreat towards the second drawing-room, where he shook hands with men of distinction with whom he was acquainted and who had withdrawn there to talk more freely of important or secret matters; then he vanished and went to his club, where he expected to meet Baron de Feroë. He did find him seated in front of a small card-table, playing écarté with the radiant d'Aversac, of whom it is only just to say that he endeavoured to repress his joy in order to avoid humiliating Malivert. Contrary to the proverb, "Fortunate at cards unfortunate in love," d'Aversac was winning, and if he had been at all superstitious he might have felt some doubt as to the soundness of his hopes. The game having come to an end, the Baron, as he was the loser, could rise, pretexting fatigue, and simply refuse the revenge offered by his adversary. Feroë and Guy de Malivert

went out together, and walked up and down the Boulevard near the club.

"What will the frequenters of that drawing-room called the Bois," said Guy to the Baron, "think of the lady and the sleigh, the horse and the coachman, all so very striking and yet unknown to every one?"

"The vision manifested itself but to you, to the Countess, on whom Spirite desired to act, and to me who, as one of the initiated, can see what is invisible to other men. You may be sure that if Mme. d'Ymbercourt speaks of the handsome Russian princess and the splendid stepper, nobody will know what she is talking about."

"Do you think," asked Malivert of the Baron, "that I shall soon see Spirite again?"

"You may expect an early visit," replied de Feroë. "The communications I receive from the other world inform me that much interest is taken in you there."

"Shall it be to-night or to-morrow? — in my rooms or in a place where I do not expect to see her, as happened to-day?" cried Malivert, as impatient as a passionate lover or a neophyte eager to penetrate a mystery.

"I cannot quite tell you that," replied the Swedish Baron. "The spirits, for whom time does not exist or has ceased to exist, do not reckon hours, since they live in eternity. As far as Spirite is concerned, if she saw you to-night or in a thousand years, it would be exactly the same thing. But spirits that deign to enter into communication with us poor mortals, remember the brevity of our life, the imperfection and the fragility of our organs; they know that between one apparition and another, if measured by the eternal dial, the perishable envelope of man has time to dissolve into dust a hundred times over; it is probable, therefore, that Spirite will not keep you waiting. She has descended to our sphere, and appears to have made up her mind to go back to her own only after carrying out her project."

"What is that project?" said Malivert. "You, to whom nothing is closed in that supernatural world, must know the motive which directs this pure spirit towards a being yet subjected to material conditions."

"On that point, my dear Guy," replied Baron de Feroë, "my lips are sealed. I may not repeat the secrets of the spirits. I was warned to put you on

your guard against any terrestrial entanglement, and to prevent your entering into bonds which might perhaps chain your soul to a place in which it would suffer from the eternal regret of having lost its freedom. My mission does not go beyond that."

Thus chatting, Malivert and the Baron, followed by their carriages which were being driven along the pavement, reached the Madeleine, the Greek columns of which, silvered by the pale beams of a winter moon, looked at the end of the broad Rue Royale something like the Parthenon, a resemblance which disappears with daylight. On arriving there the two friends separated and got into their respective coupés.

On reaching home, Malivert threw himself into his arm-chair and, his elbow leaning on the table, began to think. Spirite's apparition in the mirror had inspired him with the immaterial desire, the winged volition to which the sight of an angel gives birth, but her presence on the lake shore, under a more real feminine form, had lighted in his heart the fire of human love. He felt himself suffused with burning effluvia, and possessed by that absolute love which even eternal possession does not satisfy. As he was thinking, his

hand outstretched on the table covered with papers, he saw against the dark background of the Turkish table-cover the outlines of another hand, slender, of a perfection unequalled by art and that nature would in vain attempt to reach; a tenuous hand with long fingers, polished onyx-like nails; on the back of the hand showed a few veins of azure like the polished reflections which colour the milky opal, and it was lighted by a light which was certainly not that of the lamp. The rosy freshness of the tone and the ideal delicacy of the form proved conclusively that it could be Spirite's hand only. The small, clean, well-turned, high-bred wrist ended in a mist of soft lace. As if to plainly mark that the hand was there but as a sign, the arm and the body were wanting. While Guy gazed at it with eyes no longer amazed at anything extraordinary, the fingers of the hand stretched out on one of the sheets of writing-paper thrown confusedly on the table and began to simulate the movements of one writing. They seemed to trace lines, and when they had gone over the whole page with the rapidity of an actor writing a letter in a play, Guy caught hold of the paper, expecting to find on it written sentences, known or unknown signs. The paper was perfectly white.

Guy looked at the sheet with considerable disappointment. He put it nearer the lamp, examined it in every way, made the light fall upon it in every possible manner without discovering the least trace of writing, and yet the hand was continuing upon another sheet the same imaginary work, apparently producing no result.

"What means this?" asked Malivert of himself. "Can Spirite have written with sympathetic ink that one must heat in order to bring out the letters? But her mysterious fingers hold neither pen nor shadow of a pen. What does it mean? Am I to serve myself as secretary to this spirit, to be my own medium — to use the consecrated term? The spirits, it is said, which can produce illusions and appearances and call up in the brain of those whom they haunt fearful or superb spectacles, are incapable of acting upon material reality and of displacing even a straw."

He remembered the impulse which had led him to write the note to Mme. d'Ymbercourt, and it occurred to him that by nervous influence Spirite might, perhaps, succeed in dictating to him inwardly what she wished to say to him. All he had to do was to let his hand go and to still his own thoughts as much as he could,

so that they should not mingle with those of the spirit. Collecting himself and abstracting himself from the external world, Guy calmed his over-excited brain, turned up a little the wick of the lamp, took the pen, dipped it in the ink, placed his hand on the paper, and, his heart beating with timid hope, waited.

Very soon he experienced a curious sensation. It seemed to him that he was losing the sense of his own personality, that his individual remembrances were vanishing like those of a confused dream, that his thoughts were disappearing like birds in the heavens. Although his body was still near the table, preserving the same attitude, Guy was inwardly absent; he had vanished, disappeared. Another soul, or at least another mind had taken the place of his own and was directing those servants who, to act, were awaiting the unknown master. The nerves of his fingers trembled and began to execute movements of which he was unconscious, the pen began to move on the paper, tracing rapid signs in Guy's handwriting, slightly modified by the external impulse. This is what Spirite dictated to her medium. This confession of the outer world was found among Malivert's papers, and I have been permitted to transcribe it.

SPIRITE'S DICTATION

"First, you must know the being, undefinable by you, who has entered into your life. However penetrating you may be, you cannot succeed in making out its true nature, and as in a badly written tragedy, in which the hero states his names, titles, and references, I am obliged to explain myself; but I have this excuse, — that no one else can do it for me. Your intrepid heart, which did not hesitate to confront at my call the mysterious terrors of the unknown, does not need to be reassured. Besides, even did danger exist, it would not prevent your pursuing the adventure. The invisible world, of which this world is but the veil, has its pitfalls and abysses, but you shall not fall into any of them. Spirits of falsehood and evil traverse it; there are angels of darkness as there are angels of light, revolted powers and submissive powers, beneficent and harmful forces. The lower portion of the mystic ladder, the summit of which is lost in eternal light, is shrouded in darkness. I hope that, with my help, you will ascend the luminous rounds. I am neither angel nor demon, nor one of the intermediary spirits who bear through space the Divine Will as

the nervous fluid communicates to the limbs of the body the human will. I am merely a soul still awaiting judgment and allowed by divine goodness to anticipate a favourable sentence. I, too, have dwelt on your earth, and I could repeat the melancholy epitaph of the shepherd in Poussin's picture, '*Et in Arcadia ego.*' Do not, because I quote Latin, mistake me for the soul of a literary woman. In the place where I am everything is known intuitively, and the various languages spoken by humankind before and after the confusion of tongues are equally familiar to us. Words are but the shadows of ideas and we possess the idea itself in its essential state. If age could exist in a place where time is not, I should be very young in my new country. It is only a few days since, freed by death, I left the atmosphere which you breathe and to which I am recalled by a feeling that the passage from one world to another has not effaced. My terrestrial life, or rather, my last apparition on your planet, was very short, but it was sufficient to give me time to learn how deeply a loving soul may suffer. When Baron de Feroë sought to ascertain the nature of the spirit the vague manifestations of which troubled you, and when he asked you if ever a woman or a girl

had died of a broken heart on your account, he was nearer the truth than he believed, and although you can recall nothing of the kind, since you were unaware of it, the remark deeply troubled you and your confusion was ill concealed under a playfully sceptical denial.

"You never knew it, yet my life touched yours. Your eyes looked elsewhere, and as far as you were concerned, I was lost in the shadow.

"The first time I saw you was in the parlour of the Convent of the Birds, where you went to visit your sister, who was boarding there as I was. She was in a more advanced class, for I was then only thirteen or fourteen at most, and I seemed younger, for I was very frail, dainty, and fair. You paid no attention then to the little chit, to the child who, while busy eating the chocolate creams which her mother had brought her, glanced timidly at you. You were then about twenty or twenty-two. In my childish simplicity I thought you very handsome. The air of kindness and affection with which you spoke to your sister touched and attracted me, and I wished I had a brother like you. My childish imagination went no farther. As Mlle. de Malivert had finished her education, she

left the convent, and you not did come again. But your image was never effaced from my remembrance; it remained on the white parchment of my soul like those light outlines traced in pencil by a skilled hand which are found again long afterwards, almost invisible but persisting, the only traces at times of a vanished hand. The idea that so great a personage could ever notice me, who was still in the youngest class and treated somewhat disdainfully by the older boarders, would have been much too ambitious, and did not even occur to me, at least at that time. But I very often thought of you, and in those chaste romances woven by the most innocent imaginations, you it was who always played the part of Prince Charming, who delivered me from fancied perils, who carried me off through underground ways, who put to flight corsairs and brigands and brought me back to the King my father. For such a hero as you were must have at least an Infanta or a Princess, and I modestly assumed that rank. At other times the romance changed into a pastoral; you were a shepherd and I was a shepherdess, and our flocks mingled in tender green meadows. Without suspecting it, you formed a very considerable part of my life, and you

lorded over it. It was to you that I ascribed all my little successes at school, and I worked with all my strength to deserve your approbation. I said: 'He does not know that I have won a prize, but he will know it and he will be pleased;' and although naturally idle, I set to work again with renewed energy. Was it not curious that my child's soul should have given itself to you secretly and acknowledged itself the vassal of a lord of its own choice who did not even suspect this homage? Is it not stranger still that that first impression should never have been effaced? — for it lasted all my life, alas! a very short one, and is prolonged even beyond it. At sight of you, something indefinable and mysterious moved in me of which I understood the meaning only when my eyes, as they closed, were opened forever. My condition as an impalpable being, as a pure spirit, permits me now to tell you those things which a daughter of earth no doubt would hide; but the immaculate innocence of a soul cannot blush; celestial modesty may confess love.

"Two years thus went by. I had grown out of childhood into maidenhood, and my dreams began to become less puerile, while still remaining innocent.

There was rather less rose and azure in them and they did not always end in the blaze of an apotheosis. I often went to the end of the garden, sat down on a bench far from my companions busy with their games or whispered conversations, and I murmured like a litany the syllables of your name. Sometimes even I was bold enough to think that that name might become my own in consequence of chances or adventures as entangled as those of a comedy of cloak and sword, the plot of which I arranged to suit my own fancy.

"I belonged to a family the peer of your own, and my parents enjoyed a fortune and a rank which made the distant project of marriage which I formed almost timidly, in the most secret corner of my heart, seem anything but a chimera or a foolish vision. It would have been most natural that we should meet some day in the society in which we both moved. But would I take your fancy? would you think me pretty? That was a question which my small boarding-school mirror did not answer in the negative, as you may now judge by the reflection which I sent to your Venetian mirror, and by my appearance in the Bois de Boulogne. Supposing, however, you were

to pay as little attention to the young lady as to the child in the convent? When I thought of that, I was filled with the deepest discouragement. But youth never despairs very long, and I would soon indulge in brighter fancies. It seemed impossible to me that when you saw me you should not recognise that I was yours, that my soul was marked with your seal, that I had adored you from childhood, — in a word, that I was the one woman created purposely for you. I did not say these things to myself so plainly, for I did not then understand the emotions of my heart as I do now, when I can see the two sides of life, but it was the deep instinct of blind faith and irresistible feeling. In spite of my virginal ignorance and a candour that has perhaps never been surpassed, my soul was filled with a passion which was to destroy me, and which to-day has been revealed for the first time. I had no bosom friend at the convent, and I lived alone with my thoughts of you. Jealous of my secret, I dreaded confidences, and every friendship that would have drawn me away from my one idea was repellent to me. I was called serious, and the teachers used to propose me as a model. I awaited the time when I was to leave the convent

with less impatience than might be supposed. It was a moment of respite between thought and action. As long as I was shut up within the convent walls, I had the right to lose myself indolently in my dream without any self-reproach, but once I should have flown forth from the cage, I should have to direct my own flight, to tend to my aim, to ascend towards my star; and customs, manners, conventionalities, infinite modesty, the numerous veils with which civilisation surrounds her, forbid a young girl to take the initiative in a matter of love. She cannot take any step to reveal herself to her own ideal; a proper pride is opposed to her offering what must be priceless. Her eyes must be cast down, her lips closed, her bosom motionless; no flush, no pallor must betray her when she finds herself in the presence of the man she secretly loves, and who often goes away believing her disdainful or indifferent. How many souls created one for the other have, for lack of a word, a glance, a smile, gone different ways that separated them more and more and made their meeting forever impossible. How many lives deplorably wrecked owe their misfortune to such a cause unperceived by all, and at times unknown even to themselves. I had often

thought over these things, and they recurred more strongly to my mind at the moment when I was about to leave the convent to enter into the world. Yet I held to my resolution. The time of my departure came, my mother sent for me, and I bade farewell to my companions with but slight marks of feeling. I left no friendship and no remembrance within those walls, where several years of my life had been spent. The thought of you alone formed my treasure.

VIII

IT was with a lively feeling of pleasure that I entered the room, or rather the small apartment which my mother had prepared for me on my leaving the convent. It consisted of a bedroom, a large dressing-room and a sitting-room, the windows of which looked out on a garden prolonged by a view over the neighbouring gardens. A low wall covered with a thick mantle of ivy formed the boundary-line, but the stone showed nowhere, and nothing was visible but a procession of gigantic old chestnut trees, which gave the gardens the appearance of a vast park. Scarcely at the very extremity did the glance rest, between the more distant masses of foliage, upon the corner of a roof or the elbow of a chimney-pot, a signature which Paris places upon every one of its horizons. It was a rare satisfaction, possible only to wealth, to have before me, in the very centre of the great city, a broad, free, empty place with air, sky, sunshine, and verdure. Is it not disagreeable to feel too close to one's self other

lives, passions, vices, misfortunes, and is not the delicate modesty of the soul somewhat depressed by such close vicinage? I therefore felt genuine joy as I gazed out of my windows upon that oasis of coolness, silence, and solitude. It was August, for I had finished my last school year in the convent, and the foliage was still intensely green, but with the warmer tone which the passing of summer imparts to vegetation. In the centre of the flower garden under my windows a bed of geraniums in full bloom dazzled the eyes with its scarlet blaze. The sward surrounding this flower-bed, a carpet of green velvet of English rye grass, brought out by its emerald tint that red more ardent than fire. On the finely sanded walk marked like a ribbon by the teeth of the rakes, the birds were hopping about trustfully and seemed perfectly at home. I promised myself that I should share their excursions without making them fly away.

"My room was hung with white cashmere trimmed with blue silk cords. This was also the colour of the furniture and the window curtains. In my small sitting-room, decorated in the same way, a magnificent Érard piano offered its keyboard to my hands, and I at once tried its soft sonority. A bookcase of rosewood

placed opposite the piano contained the pure books, the chaste poets which a maiden may read, and the lower shelves contained the scores of the great composers; Bach elbowed Haydn, Mozart was side by side with Beethoven, like Raphael and Michael Angelo, and Meyerbeer leaned upon Weber. My mother had brought together the masters I admired, those who were my favourites. An elegant jardinière full of sweet-scented flowers bloomed in the centre of the room like a great nosegay. I was being treated like a spoiled child. I was the only daughter, and the whole affection of my parents was naturally concentrated upon me.

"I was to make my entrance into society at the beginning of the season, — that is, two or three months later, at the time which puts an end to country life, to travel, to sojourns in watering-places and gambling-places, to country-house parties, to hunting, racing, and all that society invents to pass the time which it is not proper for well-bred people to spend in Paris, where my parents had been detained by business. I greatly preferred remaining in town to staying in the old and rather gloomy château in the very depths of Brittany to which I had gone regularly for every vacation.

Besides, I fancied I should have a chance of meeting you, of hearing you spoken of, or of coming across people acquainted with you; but I learned indirectly that you had been gone for some time on a trip to Spain which would last a few months longer. Your friends, to whom you rarely wrote, did not expect you back before winter. It was said that your fancy had been caught by a mantilla-wearing Spanish girl. That troubled me little, for in spite of my modesty, I was conceited enough to think that my golden hair could rival the jet tresses of Andalusia. I learned also that you wrote in reviews under the Latinised pseudonym of one of your given names, known only to your intimate friends, and that the well-bred gentleman in you concealed a distinguished writer. With a curiosity you can easily understand, I sought in the files of newspapers all the articles marked by that sign. To read a writer is to place yourself in communication with his mind, for is not a book confidences addressed to an ideal friend, a conversation from which the interlocutor is absent? One must not always take literally what the author says; one must allow for philosophical or literary systems, for fashionable affectations of the day, for necessary reticence, for the style which imposes

itself on him, for admiring imitations, and whatever may modify the exterior form of a writer; but under all these disguises the true attitude of the soul at last reveals itself to the real reader, the genuine thought is often to be seen between the lines, and the poet's secret, which he does not choose to tell to the crowd, is at least to be guessed. One after another the veils fall and the answers to the riddles are learned. In order to get an idea of you, I studied with great attention your accounts of travel, your articles on philosophy and criticism, your tales and the pieces of verse scattered here and there at rather long intervals, and which marked the various phases of your mind. It is less difficult to learn to know a subjective author than an objective. The former expresses his own feelings, exposes his ideas, and judges society and creation in virtue of an ideal. The second presents objects such as they are in nature; he proceeds by images, by description; he brings things under the reader's eyes; he draws, dresses up, colours his personages accurately, puts in their mouths what they ought to have said, and keeps his own opinion to himself. That is your way of doing. At first sight you might have been accused of a certain disdainful impartiality which did not see much differ-

ence between a lizard and a man, between the glow of a sunset and the glow of a conflagration; but by reading more closely and judging by certain sudden outbreaks, swift rushes at once checked, I could divine that you were possessed of deep feeling maintained by a haughty reserve, which did not care to allow your emotions to be seen.

"This judgment of you as a writer harmonised with the instinctive judgment of my heart, and now that nothing is concealed from me I know how true it was. All sentimental trifling and hypocritically virtuous magniloquence, you had in horror, and in your opinion the worst of crimes was to deceive the soul. That made you excessively shy of expressing tender or passionate feelings; you preferred silence to falsehood or exaggeration in such sacred matters, even though fools considered you insensible, hard, and even cruel. I at once perceived this, and not for a moment did I doubt that you were kind-hearted. As to the nobility of your mind, there could be not the least uncertainty. Your proud disdain of vulgarity, of commonplaceness, enviousness, and all moral ugliness amply proved it. By dint of reading you, I learned to know you, whom I had seen but once, as well as if I had met you inti-

mately every day. I penetrated the intimate recesses of your thought and knew your starting-point, your motives, sympathies, antipathies, what you desired, what you disliked, — in a word, your whole mental being, — and from it I deduced what your character must be. Sometimes when reading, struck by a passage which was a revelation to me, I would rise and go to the piano, and play, as a comment on your sentences, motives analogous in colour and sentiment which prolonged the passage in sonorous or melancholy vibrations. I enjoyed hearing in another way the echo of your thought. Perhaps these relations were imaginary and could have been seized by none but myself, but unquestionably some of them were real. I know it now that I dwell in the eternal source of inspiration, and that I see it fall like luminous sparks upon the head of genius.

"While reading those of your works which I could procure, — for the range of action of a young girl is so narrow that the smallest step is difficult for her, — the se on was advancing, the trees were turning yellow with the golden tints of late autumn, the leaves, one after another, fell from the branches, and the gardener, in spite of his care, could not prevent the sward and

the gravel from being thickly covered with them. Sometimes, when I wandered in the garden under the chestnut trees, the fall of a chestnut falling on my head like a ball or rolling at my feet out of its broken husk, interrupted my reverie and made me involuntarily start. The delicate plants and shrubs were being taken into the hot-house, the birds had the uneasy look which they have at the approach of winter, and at evening I could hear them quarrelling on the bare branches. The season was about to begin; society was returning to Paris from every point of the horizon. On the Champs Élysées were again to be seen carriages with coats of arms on the panels driven slowly up towards the Arc de l'Étoile to enjoy the last rays of the sun; the Théâtre-Italien published its list of singers and its repertoire, and announced the forthcoming opening. I rejoiced at the thought that this general movement of return would bring you back from Spain and that, weary of the gloomy sierras, you would enjoy coming to receptions, parties, and balls, where I hoped I might meet you.

"Once, while driving in the Bois de Boulogne with my mother, I saw you ride by our carriage, but so swiftly that I had scarcely time to recognise you. It

was the first time that I had seen you since your visit to the convent. My blood rushed to my heart and I felt a sort of electric shock. Under pretext of feeling the cold, I lowered my veil to conceal the change in my face, and I sank silently back into the corner of the carriage. My mother pulled up the window and said: 'It is not warm. A mist is coming up and we had better return, unless you wish to drive on.' I nodded assent. I had learned what I wished to learn; I knew that you were in Paris.

"We used to go to the Opera once a week. It was a great treat to me to hear the singers of whom I had heard so much, but whom I did not know. Another hope also stirred my heart; I need not tell you what it was. Our day came. Patti was to sing 'La Sonnambula.' My mother had had made for me a pretty, simple, dress suited to my age: an underskirt of white taffeta with an overskirt of tarlatan, and bows of blue velvet and pearls. My hair was dressed with a band of velvet of the same colour, with pearls twisted around it and the ends falling down on my shoulders. As I looked in my mirror while my maid was putting on the last touches, I asked myself, 'Is he fond of blue?' In Alfred de Musset's 'Caprice,' Mme. de Léry says

it is a stupid colour. And yet I could not help thinking that the blue ribbon looked very well with my golden hair. If you had seen me, I think you would have loved me. Clotilde, my maid, as she arranged the folds of the dress and the bows on my bodice, said that I was very pretty that evening.

"The carriage deposited my mother and myself in front of the peristyle, — my father was to join us later, — and we began slowly to ascend the great, red-carpeted staircase. The warm atmosphere was perfumed with cuscus and patchouli; ladies in full dress, their gowns still concealed by the mantles, pelisses, burnouses, scarfs, and opera cloaks which they were presently to hand to their lackeys, were ascending the stairs, their long trains of watered silk, satin, and velvet trailing behind them, and resting their hands on the arm of grave men in white neckties, whose black coats had in the button-hole strings of orders, which meant that they intended, after the opera, to proceed to some official or diplomatic reception. Tall, slender young fellows, their hair parted in the middle, most correctly and elegantly dressed, followed close behind, drawn to a group by a smile.

"All this is no novelty to you, and you would paint the picture better than I, but the sight was new to a

little boarding-school girl making her entrance into society. Life is always the same. It is like a play in which the spectators alone change; but one who has not seen the performance is interested in it as if it were made purposely for him and were being given for the first time. I was happy. I felt I was beautiful; approving glances had been cast upon me; some women had looked around after having examined me with a rapid glance, and found nothing to blame either in my dress or my coiffure.

"I had a secret presentiment that I should see you that evening. This hope imparted a slight animation to my features and flushed my cheeks more brilliantly than usual. We sat down in our box, and soon glasses were turned upon me. Mine was a new face, and new faces are quickly noted at the Opera, which is like a great drawing-room where everybody knows everybody else. My mother's presence told people who I was, and I understood from the way they bent towards each o er that I was being talked about in several boxes, favourably no doubt, for kindly smiles followed the whispered sentences. I felt somewhat awkward at being the observed of all observers; wearing a low-necked dress for the first time, I felt my shoulders

shiver under the gauze which covered them with its semi-transparency. The rise of the curtain — for the overture had been little listened to — made every one look towards the stage and put an end to my embarrassment. Undoubtedly the aspect of that beautiful hall starred with diamonds and bouquets, with its gilding, its footlights, its white caryatids, awoke in me both surprise and admiration, and Bellini's music performed by artists of the first rank carried me away into a world of enchantment; yet the real interest of the evening did not lie there so far as I was concerned. While my ears listened to the suave melodies of the Sicilian composer, my eyes were timidly examining every box, roaming over the balcony, and examining the orchestra stalls in order to discover you. The first act was nearly ended before you came, and when the curtain was rung down, you turned half round towards the auditorium, looking rather bored and gazing at the boxes indifferently without letting your glance rest on any one in particular. Your complexion was browned by six months' travel in Spain, and there was on your face a certain expression of nostalgia, as if you regretted the country you had left. My heart beat loudly while you were making this rapid inspec-

tion, and for a moment I thought your glance had noted me, but I was mistaken. I saw you leave your seat and reappear shortly afterwards in a box opposite our own. It was occupied by a pretty woman very splendidly dressed, whose black hair shone like satin. Her pale rose-coloured dress was almost undistinguishable from the flesh tones of her bosom; diamonds sparkled in her hair, in her ears, on her neck and her arms. On the velvet-covered rail by the side of her opera-glasses bloomed a great bouquet of Parma violets and camellias. At the back, in the shadow, I could make out an old, bald-headed, obese person, the lappel of whose coat half-concealed the star of some foreign order. The lady spoke to you with unmistakable pleasure and you replied to her in a careless, easy way, without seeming to be particularly taken with her more than friendly manner. My disappointment at not having been noticed by you was compensated for by the joy of feeling that you did not love that bold-eyed woman with the alluring smile and the dazzling toilet.

"A few minutes later, as the musicians began to tune up for the second act, you took leave of the lady with the diamonds and the old gentleman with the foreign

order, and returned to your seat. The performance ended without your turning your head once, and in my soul I felt annoyed with you. I wondered that you could not guess that a young girl in a white dress with blue bows wanted very much to be looked at by the man she had secretly chosen. I had so long wished to find myself in the same place as you; my wish was granted, and you did not even suspect that I was present. You ought to have felt, it seemed to me, a sympathetic thrill; you ought to have turned around and looked slowly through the hall impelled by a secret emotion; your glance should have stopped on the box I was in, and you should have put your hand to your heart and fallen into an ecstasy. The hero of a novel would not have failed to do so. But you were not the hero of a novel.

"My father, who had had to go to a state dinner, came in the middle of the second act only, and seeing you in the orchestra stalls, he said, 'Why! there is Guy de Malivert! I did not know that he had returned from Spain. His trip means for us endless bull-fights in the Review, for Guy is a bit of a barbarian.' I delighted in hearing your name spoken by my father's lips. You were not unknown to my

family; we might therefore meet. It would be easy indeed to do so. I was thus somewhat consoled for the lack of success I had met with that evening. The performance closed without any other incident than showers of bouquets, recalls, and ovations to Patti. While waiting in the vestibule until our footman announced our carriage, I saw you pass with a friend and draw a cigar from a case of fine Manila esparto. The desire to smoke made you careless, I am bound to say, of the exhibition of beauties and ugly women, who were ranged upon the lower steps of the staircase. You made your way through the mass of dresses, caring little whether or not you rumpled them, and you soon reached the door with your friend following in your wake.

"On returning home, happy and dissatisfied, I went to bed after having tried with no great success some of the melodies of 'La Sonnambula,' as if to prolong the vibrations of the evening; and then I went to sleep, thinking of you.

IX

ONE often finds when, after a certain time the remembrance and the image are compared, that imagination has worked like a painter, who goes on with a portrait in the absence of his model, softening the surfaces, graduating the tints, making the contours melt one into another, and bringing back, in spite of himself, the portrait to his own particular ideal. I had not seen you for more than three years, but my heart had accurately preserved the memory of your face. Only, you had changed somewhat; your features had become firmer and more accentuated, and the sunburn of travel had imparted to your complexion a warmer and more vigorous colour. The man showed more in the young man, and you had that air of tranquil authority and assured force which takes women perhaps more than beauty. None the less I preserved carefully within my soul the first drawing, the slight sketch of the being who was to have so much influence over me, just as one preserves

a miniature of the youth by the side of the portrait of later days. My dreams had not harmed you, and I was not obliged, when I saw you again, to strip you of a mantle of fancied perfections. I thought of all this, curled up in my bed and watching the gleam of the night-light trembling on the blue roses of the carpet, while awaiting sleep that did not come, but which towards morning closed my eyes, mingling vague harmonies with disconnected dreams.

"A few weeks later we received an invitation to a great ball given by the Duchess de C——. For a young girl her first ball is an event. This one was the more interesting to me that it was likely you would be at it, the Duchess being a great friend of yours. Balls are our battles which we win or lose. It is there that the young girl, issuing from the shadows of the gynæceum, shines in all her splendour. Custom grants her during this short space of time, under the pretext of dancing, a sort of relative freedom, and the ball is to her like the foyer of the Opera where dominoes walk with uncovered faces. She may be approached with an invitation to dance a quadrille or a mazurka, and during the figures of a country-dance she may even be spoken to; but very often the long

list on her engagement card does not contain the one name that she really has longed for.

"I had to think of my dress, for a ball dress is a poem, and that of a young girl is a very difficult thing to make up. It has to be both simple and rich; that is to say, it must possess contrary characteristics. A light dress entirely white would not have been the thing, so I made up my mind, after a good deal of hesitation, to have a skirt and overskirt of gauze worked with silver, caught up with bouquets of forget-me-nots, the blue of which matched admirably the turquoise set which my father had purchased for me. Clusters of turquoises, imitating the flowers scattered over my dress, formed my head-dress. Thus attired, I fancied myself capable of showing not too disadvantageously among the splendid toilets and the famous beauties. Indeed, for a mere child of earth, I looked rather well.

"The Duchess de C—— inhabited one of those vast mansions in the Faubourg Saint-Germain built for the splendid lives of other days, mansions which modern life finds it difficult to fill. It takes the crowd and splendour of a feast to animate them as of yore. From the outside no one would have suspected the

extent of this princely mansion. A high wall between two houses with a monumental carriage-gate, over which, in gilt letters upon a tablet of green marble, was written, 'Hôtel de C——,' was all that could be seen from the street. A long avenue of old lime-trees, trimmed in the shape of an arch after the old French fashion and which winter had stripped of their leaves, led to a vast court at the back of which rose the mansion, built in the pure Louis XIV style, with high windows, columns half engaged and mansard attics, like the architecture of Versailles. A red and white awning, supported by carved uprights, projected over the red-carpeted steps. I had time to examine all these details by the light given out by the clusters of lamps, for the guests, though select, were numerous, and we had to fall in line just as at a great reception. The carriage drew up before the steps, and we handed our pelisses to our footman. By a glass door, the leaves of which he opened and shut, stood a gigantic porter with splendid broad shoulders. In the vestibule we passed between two lines of footmen in full livery and powdered; every one of them tall, motionless, and perfectly serious. They looked like domestic caryatids, and seemed to feel that it was an honour to

be lackeys in such a house. The whole of the staircase, in which a small palace of to-day could easily have been put, was lined with huge camellias. At every landing great mirrors allowed the ladies to repair, as they went up, the slight disorder caused in a ball toilet by mantles, light as they may be, and which was shown by the brilliant blaze of a chandelier that hung, sustained by a golden cord, from a cupola where in azure and clouds the brush of some pupil of Lebrun or Mignard had painted a boldly foreshortened mythological allegory in the taste of his day.

"Between the windows were landscapes, oblong in shape, severe in style, and dark in colour, which might have been attributed to Poussin, or at least to Gaspard Dughet; so, at least, thought a famous painter who was going up the stairs by our side, and who had put his glass to his eye to examine them more closely. At the turn of the stairs, upon the steps of the balustrade, which was a marvel of iron work, were statues of marble by Lepautre and Théodon, bearing candelabra the brilliancy of which equalled that of the chandelier, so that the feast, thanks to the splendour of the light, began even on the staircase. At the door of the antechamber, hung with Gobelins tapestries after cartoons by Oudry,

and wainscotted in old oak, stood an usher dressed in black with a silver chain around his neck, who in a voice more or less loud according to the importance of the title, called out into the first drawing-room the names of the guests.

"The Duke, tall, thin, made up of long lines like a thorough-bred greyhound, had a distinguished, aristocratic air, and in spite of his age, preserved traces of his former elegance. Even in the street, no one could have mistaken his rank. Standing a short distance from the door, he received the invited guests with a gracious word, a hand-shake, a bow, a nod, a smile, with a sure appreciation of what was due to each, and with such perfect grace that every one was satisfied and believed himself specially favoured. He bowed to my mother in a respectful, friendly way, and as it was the first time he had seen me, he spoke in a few words a semi-paternal, semi-gallant madrigal that smacked of the old Court. Near the mantel-piece stood the Duchess, rouged with utter carelessness of illusion, plainly wearing a wig and exhibiting historical diamonds upon her thin bosom intrepidly low-necked. She was an uncommonly witty woman, and under her broad brown eyelids her eyes still shone with extraordi-

nary brilliancy. She wore a dress of dark-garnet velvet with great flounces of English point-lace, and a row of diamonds at her bodice. With a careless hand she fanned herself with a large fan painted by Watteau, while she spoke to the persons who came to pay their respects. She looked uncommonly aristocratic. She exchanged a few words with my mother who presented me to her, and as I bowed, she touched my brow with her cold lips and said, 'Go, dear, and be sure not to miss a single dance.'

"This ceremony over, we entered the next drawing-room, which led to the ball-room. On the red damask hangings, in magnificent frames contemporary with the paintings themselves, hung family portraits that were not put there through aristocratic pride, but simply as masterpieces of art. They were by Clouet, Porbus, Van Dyck, Philippe de Champagne and de Largillière, and every one was worthy of being placed in the Tribune of a museum. What I enjoyed about the luxury in this house was that nothing was recent. The paintings, the gilding, the damasks, the brocades, though not faded, were dulled and did not annoy the eye by the loud brilliancy of newness. One felt that the wealth was of long standing, and that things had always been so.

The ball-room was of a size now scarcely met with save in palaces. Numerous standing-lamps and bracket-lamps placed in the bays between the windows formed with their thousands of tapers a sort of luminous conflagration through which the azure paintings of the ceiling with their wreaths of nymphs and cupids showed as through a rosy vapour. In spite of the brilliant light the room was so large that there was no lack of air and one breathed comfortably. The orchestra was placed in a sort of gallery at the end of the room in a grove of rare plants. On velvet benches arranged in semicircles were rows of ladies dazzlingly dressed if not dazzlingly beautiful, though there were some very pretty ones. The sight was superb. We happened to come in exactly between two dances and, seated near my mother on the end of a bench which happened to be free, I gazed on this spectacle, new to me, with astonishment and curiosity. The gentlemen, having taken their partners back to their seats, were walking about in the centre of the room looking to right and left, as if reviewing the women before making their choice. It was the youthful time of the ball, for somewhat mature men do not now dance. There were young attachés of embassies, and secretaries of

legations, auditors of the Council of State in expectation, beardless masters of requests, officers who had gone through their first campaign, clubmen diplomatically serious, youthful sportsmen thinking of keeping a stud, dandies whose whiskers were not much more than down, and eldest sons with the precocious authority of a great name and of a great fortune. Among these young people were a few serious personages covered with orders, whose polished heads shone like ivory in the light of the lustres, or were concealed under wigs either too dark or too fair. As they passed by, they addressed polite remarks to the dowagers contemporary with their own youth, then turning aside, they would examine like experts and disinterested connoisseurs the feminine harem outspread before their eyes and their glasses. The first strains of the orchestra made them retrograde as quickly as their gouty feet allowed towards quieter drawing-rooms, where at tables lighted by tapers covered with green shades they played at bouillotte or écarté.

"You will readily believe that I did not lack dancers. A young Hungarian in his magnate's dress, braided, embroidered, studded with buttons of precious stones, bowed gracefully to me and asked me for a mazurka.

His features were regular, romantically pale, with great, black, somewhat shy eyes, and mustaches as sharp as needles. An Englishman of twenty-two or twenty-three who resembled Lord Byron except that he was not lame, the attaché of a Northern court, and some others wrote their names at once on my card. Although the old dancing master at the convent used to boast of me as being one of his best and most graceful pupils, and praised my lightness and my feeling for time, I was not, I confess, entirely at my ease; I felt, as the papers say, the emotions inseparable from a début. It seemed to me, as shy people always fancy, that all eyes were fixed upon me. Fortunately my Hungarian partner was an excellent dancer who helped out my first attempts, and soon, carried away by the music, intoxicated by the motion, I regained assurance and allowed myself to be spun into the whirlpool of floating skirts with a sort of pleasurable excitement. Yet I never forgot my usual thought and my object in coming to the ball. As I passed by the dancers, with a rapid glance I tried to see if you were in the other rooms. I at last caught sight of you in the recess of a window, talking with a dark-faced, long-nosed, black-bearded man wearing a red fez, in the uniform of the

Nizam, with the Medjidieh order on his breast, no doubt either a bey or a pacha. When the whirl of the dance brought me back, there you were still speaking with animation to your orientally placid Turk, not deigning to cast a glance at the pretty faces that passed before you, flushed by the dance, in the shimmer of light.

"Nevertheless I did not lose hope, and for the time I was satisfied to know that you were there. Besides, the evening was not over, and some fortunate chance might bring us together. My partner took me back to my seat, and again the men began to walk up and down the space circumscribed by the benches. You took a turn with your Turk through the moving multitude, looking at the ladies and the toilets, but with no more interest than you might have looked at pictures or statues. From time to time you made a remark to your friend the pacha, who smiled gravely. I could see you doing all this through my fan, which I closed, I confess, when you approached the place where we were seated. My heart beat high and I felt myself blush to the shoulders. It was impossible this time that I should escape your notice, for you walked as close to the benches as the dazzling fringe of gauze, lace, and flounces which overflowed, allowed you to do; but

unfortunately two or three friends of my mother's stopped before us and paid her compliments, some of which were addressed to me. This screen of black coats masked me entirely. You had to go around the group and I remained invisible, though I did bend my head somewhat in the hope that you might see me. But you could not guess that those black coats, respectfully inclined, concealed from you a rather pretty girl who thought of no one but you and who had come to the ball on your account alone. I saw you leave the room by the other end, the Turk's red cap being the mark by which I followed you in the maze of dark coats which answer for a festival as well as for mourning. My enjoyment vanished and I seemed dreadfully discouraged. Ironical Fate seemed to enjoy teasing me and taking you away from me. I danced the dances I was engaged for, and pretending to be somewhat tired, I refused other invitations. The play had lost its charm for me, the dresses seemed faded, and the lights turning dim. My father, who was playing cards in another room and who had lost some hundred louis to an old gentleman, came in to take us around the apartments, and show us the hot-house into which the last room led, which was reputed to be marvellous; in-

deed, nothing could be more magnificent. It was like a virgin forest, so vigorously did the banana trees, the shaddocks, the palms, and other tropical plants grow in the warm atmosphere saturated with exquisite perfumes. At the end of the hot-house a white marble naiad poured out the waters of her urn into a gigantic shell of the Southern Seas surrounded by a mass of waterplants. There I caught sight of you again. You had your sister on your arm, but you were ahead of us and we could not meet you, for we followed in the same direction the narrow path, covered with yellow sand and bordered with verdure, that wound around the clumps of shrubs, flowers, and plants.

"We walked two or three times through the drawing-rooms, where the crowd had somewhat diminished, for the dancers had gone to restore their strength at the buffet, served with elegant profusion in a gallery wainscotted with ebony and gilding and adorned with paintings by Desportes, representing flowers, fruits, and game, of splendid colouring, which time had simply made richer. All these details which I glanced at carelessly remained in my memory, and I recall them even in this world where life seems only the dream of a shadow. They are connected for me with feelings

so deep that they compel me to return to earth. I returned to my home as sad as I had left it joyous, and attributed my mournful look to a slight headache. As I exchanged for a night wrapper the ball toilet which had been useless to me, since I desired to be beautiful for you alone, I said with a sigh, 'Why did n't he ask me to dance, as the Hungarian, the Englishman, and the other men did, although I cared nothing for them? It was a very easy matter. It was the most natural thing at a ball. But everybody looked at me except the one being whose attention I desired to attract. There is no doubt that my unfortunate love is very unlucky.' I went to bed, and a few tears rolled from my eyelids to my pillow."

Here stopped Spirite's dictation. The lamp had long since gone out for lack of oil, and Malivert, like somnambulists who need no exterior light, was still writing. Page followed page without Guy being conscious of it. Suddenly the impulse that guided his hand stopped, and his own thought, suspended by that of Spirite, returned to him. The faint light of dawn was filtering through the curtains of his room. He pulled them aside, and the pallid light of a winter

morning showed him on the table many pages covered with feverish, rapid writing, the work of the night. Although he had written them with his own hand, he did not know their contents. With ardent curiosity, with deep emotion, he read the artless and chaste confidences of the lovely soul, of the adorable being, whose executioner he had been; innocently, it is needless to add. This tardy confession of love coming from the other world, breathed by a shadow, inspired him with desperate regret and powerless rage against himself. How could he have been stupid enough, blind enough to pass thus by the side of happiness without perceiving it. But he grew calm at last. Happening to look up at the Venetian mirror, he saw the reflection of Spirite smiling upon him.

X

A STRANGE experience it is, to receive a revelation of retrospective happiness which has passed close to you without being perceived, and which you have lost through your own fault. Never can regret for the irreparable be more bitter. One would like to live over again one's past days. Wonderful plans are made, and after the event one indulges in the most amazing perspicacity; but life cannot be turned over like an hourglass; the grain of sand once fallen will never ascend again. Guy de Malivert reproached himself in vain for not having found out the charming creature, who was neither buried in a Constantinople harem nor hidden behind the gratings of an Italian or Spanish convent, nor guarded like Rosina by a jealous guardian, but who had been of his own world, whom he could have seen every day, and from whom no insuperable obstacle separated him. She loved him; he could have asked her in marriage, he would have obtained her hand, and

he would have enjoyed the supreme and rare felicity of being united even in this life to the soul destined to his soul. From the way in which he adored her shadow he understood what a passion the girl herself would have inspired in him. But soon his thoughts took another course; he ceased to reproach himself, and regretted his commonplace grief. What had he lost, since, after all, Spirite had preserved her love beyond the tomb and had come from the depths of the Infinite to descend to the sphere which he inhabited? Was not the passion he felt nobler, more poetic, more ethereal, more like eternal love, since it was thus rid of terrestrial contingencies, and had for its object a being idealised by death? Has not the most perfect human union its weariness, its satiety, its lassitude? The most dazzled eyes see, after a few years, the charms they first adored turn pale; the soul is less visible through the worn flesh and love seeks in amazement its vanished ideal.

These reflections and the ordinary course of life with its exigencies, which even the most enthusiastic dreamers cannot escape, led on Malivert until the evening, which he so impatiently awaited. When he had shut himself up in his room and seated himself by

the table as the night before, prepared to write, the little white, slender, blue-veined hand reappeared, signing to Malivert to take the pen. He obeyed and his fingers began to move of themselves without his brain dictating anything. Spirite's thought had taken the place of his own.

SPIRITE'S DICTATION

"I do not intend to weary you in posthumous fashion by telling you of all my disappointments. One day, however, I did feel a lively joy, and I thought that imperious fate, which seemed to enjoy concealing me from your glance, was about to cease troubling me. We were to dine the following Saturday at Mme. de L——'s. That alone would have been very indifferent to me, had I not learned during the week through Baron de Feroë, who sometimes came to see us, that you were to be one of the guests at this half worldly, half literary feast, for M. de L—— enjoyed entertaining artists and writers. He was a man of taste, a connoisseur of books and paintings, and possessed a library and a very fine collection of paintings. You occasionally went to his receptions, as did also several famous authors, and others who were

becoming famous. M. de L—— piqued himself on his ability to discover talent, and he was not of those who believe in settled reputations only. I said to myself, in my childish exultation, 'At last I have got hold of that fugitive, of that unapproachable man. This time he cannot escape me. When we shall be seated at the same table, perhaps side by side, lighted by fifty tapers, careless though he may be, he will have to see me, unless, however, there happens to be between us a mass of flowers or a centre-piece which may conceal me.' The days which still separated me from the happy Saturday seemed dreadfully long, as long as study hours at the convent. They went by, however, and the three of us, my father, my mother, and myself, reached M. de L——'s some thirty minutes before the dinner hour. The guests, grouped about the drawing-room, were chatting with each other, coming and going, looking at the pictures, glancing at the pamphlets on the tables, or telling stage news to some ladies seated on a divan near the mistress of the house. Among them were two or three illustrious writers whose names my father told me, but whose faces did not seem to me in harmony with their works. You had not yet arrived. The guests were all there,

and M. de L—— was beginning to complain of your lack of punctuality, when a tall footman entered, bringing on a silver salver, on which was a pencil to sign and to mark the hour of delivery, a telegram from you, sent from Chantilly and containing these words only, in telegraphic style: 'Missed my train. Don't wait. Awfully sorry.'

"Cruel was my disappointment. The whole week I had caressed this hope, which vanished at the moment it was about to be fulfilled. I was filled with a sadness which I had great difficulty in concealing, and the flush which animation had imparted to my cheeks vanished. Fortunately the doors of the dining-room were opened, and the butler announced dinner. The movement which took place among the guests prevented my emotion being noticed. When everybody was seated, a chair remained empty on my right. It was yours; I could not be mistaken, for your name was written in fine writing upon a card with pretty coloured arabesques placed near your glasses. So the irony of fate was complete. But for this commonplace railway difficulty I should have had you near me during the whole meal, touching my dress, your hand touching mine when paying those innumerable little attentions

that at table the least gallant man feels himself bound to render to a woman. A few commonplace words to begin with, like every overture to a dialogue, would have been exchanged between us, then, the ice having been broken, our conversation would have become more intimate, and your soul, your mind would soon have understood my heart. Perchance I might not have displeased you, and although fresh from Spain, you might have forgiven the rosy fairness of my complexion, the pale gold of my hair. If you had come to that dinner, your life and mine would unquestionably have moved in another direction; you would no longer be a bachelor, and I should be alive and not reduced to tell you my love from the other world. The love which you feel for my shadow leads me to believe, without being too conceited, that you would not have been insensible to my terrestrial charms. But it was not to be. The unoccupied chair which isolated me from the other guests seemed to me a symbol of my fate, — it betokened vain expectation and solitude in the midst of the crowd. The sinister omen has been too well fulfilled. My neighbour on the left was, as I learned later, a very amiable and very learned academician. He tried several times

to make me talk, but I answered in monosyllables only, and even these were so ill fitted to the questions that my neighbour naturally took me for a little idiot, left me to myself, and chatted with his other partner.

"I scarcely touched the food; my heart was so heavy that I could not eat. At last the dinner ended and we went to the drawing-room, where the guests formed groups according to their preferences. In one, rather close to the arm-chair in which I was seated, so that I could hear what was being said, your name, spoken by M. d'Aversac, excited my curiosity. 'That chap Malivert,' said d'Aversac, 'is cracked about his pacha. On the other hand, the pacha is crazy about Malivert. They are never apart. Mohammed or Mustapha, I do not remember which is his name, wants to take Guy to Egypt and talks of giving him a steamer to take him to the first cataract, but Guy, who is as barbaric as the Turk is civilised, would prefer a dahabheah. He rather likes the plan, for he thinks it is very cold in Paris. He has a fancy for spending the winter in Cairo and continuing the study of Arab architecture which he commenced in the Alhambra; but if he does go, I am afraid we shall never see him

again, and that he will turn Moslem like Hassan, the hero of "Namouna."'

"'He is quite capable of it,' answered a young fellow who was in the group; 'he has never greatly liked Western civilisation.'

"'Nonsense!' replied another. 'Once he has worn a few genuine costumes, taken a dozen vapour baths, purchased from the Djellabs one or two slaves whom he will sell at a discount, gazed on the Pyramids, sketched the broken-nosed profile of the Sphinx, he will calmly come back to tramp the asphalt of the Boulevard des Italiens, which is, after all, the only inhabitable place in the world.'

"This conversation filled me with deep anxiety. You were about to leave and for how long nobody knew. Would I have the chance of meeting you before your departure and leaving you at least my image to carry away with you? That was a piece of happiness I dared no longer believe in after so many disappointments.

"On returning home, after having reassured my mother, who fancied I must be ill, so pale was I, for she could not suspect what was going on in my heart, I thought deeply over my position. I asked myself

whether the obstinacy of circumstances to separate us was not a secret warning of Fate which it would be dangerous to disobey. Perhaps you would be fatal to me, and it was wrong to insist on throwing myself in your way. My reason alone spoke, for my heart repelled the idea and meant to incur to the very last the risk of its love. I felt myself irresistibly drawn to you, and the bond, frail though it seemed, was more solid than a diamond chain. Unfortunately I was the only one bound. 'How painful is the fate of woman!' I said to myself, 'doomed to expectation, to inaction, to solitude, she cannot without failing in modesty, manifest her feelings. She must yield to the love she inspires, but she must not declare that which she feels. From the moment my heart awoke, one sentiment alone filled it, — a pure, absolute, eternal sentiment, — and the being who is the object of it will never know it perhaps. How can I let him know that a young girl whom he no doubt would love if he could suspect such a secret, lives and breathes for him alone?'

"For a moment I thought of writing you one of those letters such as authors, I am told, receive at times, in which, under the veil of admiration crop out feelings

of another sort, and which solicit a rendezvous, in no wise compromising, at the theatre or at the promenade; but my feminine modesty revolted at the employment of such means, and I feared lest you should take me for a bluestocking seeking your assistance to have a novel accepted by the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

"D'Aversac had spoken the truth: the next week you had started for Cairo with your pacha. Your departure, which postponed my hopes to an uncertain time, filled me with a melancholy which I found it difficult to conceal. I had lost interest in life. I cared nothing for dress; when I went into society, I let my maid select my toilets. What was the use of being beautiful since you were not there? And yet I was still beautiful enough to be surrounded like Penelope with a whole crowd of suitors. Little by little our drawing-room, frequented by my father's friends, serious and somewhat mature men, was filled with younger men, who came very assiduously to our Fridays. In the recesses of the doors I could see handsome dark fellows, correctly curled, whose cravats had cost them much meditation before they tied them, and who cast on me passionate and fascinating glances; others, during the figures of a quadrille, when we danced to the accom-

paniment of the piano, uttered sighs which, without being the least touched, I attributed to their being breathless; others, bolder, risked a few moral and poetic phrases about the happiness of a suitable marriage, and claimed to be created purposely for legitimate happiness. They were all brave, irreproachable, well-dressed, ideally delicate; the scent on their hair came from Houbigant, their clothes were made by Renard. What more could an exacting, romantic imagination ask for? Therefore those handsome young fellows seemed somewhat surprised at the slight impression they produced on me; those who were most annoyed even suspected me, I believe, of being poetical. I had some serious offers; my hand was more than once asked of my parents, but on my being consulted I always replied in the negative, managing to find excellent objections. My parents did not insist. I was so young that there was no need of hurrying and later repenting a precipitate choice. Believing that I had some secret preference, my mother questioned me, and I was on the point of revealing the truth to her, but an invincible modesty kept me back. The love which I alone felt and which you were ignorant of, seemed to be a secret which I

had no right to tell without your consent. It did not belong to me alone, you had a share in it; so I kept silence; and besides, I could never confess, even to the most indulgent of mothers, my mad passion,—for thus it might well seem,—born from an impression of childhood in the convent parlour, obstinately maintained in my soul, and justified by nothing from a human point of view. Had I spoken, my mother, seeing that my choice was in no wise blameworthy, or impossible of realisation, would no doubt have sought to bring us together, and used, to make you declare yourself, some of those subterfuges which, on similar occasions, the most honest and virtuous women manage to invent. But this was repugnant to my virginal probity. I would have no intermediary between you and me. You alone were to notice me and find me out. In that way alone could I be happy and forgive myself for having been the first to love you. My maidenly modesty needed this consolation and this excuse. It was neither pride nor coquetry, but a genuine feeling of feminine dignity.

"Time passed and you returned from Egypt. I began to hear of your attentions to Mme. d'Ymbercourt, with whom you were said to be very much in love.

My heart took fright and I wished to see my rival. She was shown to me in her box at the opera. I tried to judge her impartially, and I thought her handsome, but without charm and without refinement. She was like a copy of a classical statue made by a mediocre sculptor. She united in herself everything that goes to make up the ideal of dolts, and I wondered that you could have the least fancy for such an idol. Mme. d'Ymbercourt's face, so regular at first sight, lacked distinguishing traits, original grace, unexpected charms. Such as she appeared to me on that evening, such she must always be. In spite of what I heard, I was conceited enough not to be jealous of her. Yet the reports of your marriage became more and more numerous, and as ill news always reaches those whom it interests, I was informed of everything that went on between you and Mme. d'Ymbercourt. At one time I was told that the banns had been called; at another the exact day of the wedding was named. I had no means of ascertaining the accuracy or falseness of these reports. The whole thing appeared to every one settled and most delightful in every respect, and so I had to believe it; yet the secret voice of my heart assured me that you did not love Mme. d'Ym-

bercourt. But very often people marry without love, to have an establishment, a settled position in society, or because they feel the need of repose after the heat and excitement of youth. I was filled with deep despair and saw my life drawing to a close. My chaste dream, caressed so long, vanished forever. I dared not even think of you in the most mysterious recesses of my soul, for as you now belonged to another before God and men, my thoughts of you, hitherto innocent, became culpable. In my passion as a girl nothing had occurred to make my guardian angel blush. Once I met you in the Bois de Boulogne, riding by Mme. d'Ymbercourt's carriage, and I threw myself back in my own, taking as much care to conceal myself as formerly I would have taken to be seen by you. That rapid glimpse was the last I had of you.

"I was scarcely seventeen. What was going to become of me? What would be the end of a life secretly destroyed at its very beginning? Should I accept one of the suitors approved by my parents in their wisdom? That is what, on such occasions, have done many young girls separated as I was from their ideal by some obscure fatality. But my sense of loyalty revolted from such a course, for I believed that,

my first and only thought of love having been for you, I could belong to no one but you in this world; any other union would have struck me as almost adulterous. My heart held but a single page; you had written your name on it unwittingly, and no other was to take its place. Your own marriage would not free me from being faithful to you. Unconscious of my love, you were free, but I was bound. The idea of being the wife of another man filled me with insurmountable horror, and after having refused several suitors, knowing well how difficult a position in society is that of an old maid, I made up my mind to leave the world and become a nun. God alone could shelter my grief and perhaps console me.

XI

I ENTERED as a novice the convent of the Sisters of Mercy in spite of my parents' remonstrances, which moved me, but did not shake my courage. Firm though one's resolve may be, the moment of the final separation is terrible. At the end of a long passage a grating marks the limit between the world and the cloister. The family may accompany to that threshold, not to be crossed by the profane, the maiden who gives herself to God. After the last embrace, the end of which is awaited by gloomy, veiled figures with an impassible air, the grating opens just wide enough to allow the passage of the novice, whom shadowy arms seem to carry away, and it closes with a rattle of iron that echoes down the long corridors like distant thunder. The sound of the closing of a coffin is not more lugubrious, and does not strike the heart more painfully. I felt myself grow pale and an icy chill seized me. I had taken my first step out of earthly life, henceforth closed to me; I was penetrating into

that cold region where passions die, where remembrance vanishes, and which the rumours of the world no longer reach. There naught exists but the thought of God. It suffices to fill the frightful void and the silence which weighs on this place, a silence as deep as that of the tomb. I may tell you all this, now I am dead.

"My piety, though tender and fervent, did not go to the length of mystical exaltation; it was a human motive rather than an imperious vocation that had caused me to seek peace in the solitary cloister. I was a shipwrecked soul, cast upon an unknown reef, and my dream, invisible to all, had ended tragically. At the beginning, therefore, I suffered what in the devout life is called dryness of heart, weariness, longing for the world, vague despair, — the last temptations of the spirit of the day, trying to seize his prey; but soon the tumult was appeased, the habit of prayer and of religious practices the regularity of the offices and the monotony of a rule intended to overcome the rebellion of the soul and of the body, turned towards heaven thoughts that yet too often recalled the earth. Your image still lived in my heart, but I succeeded in loving you only in and through God. The Convent of the

Sisters of Mercy is not one of those romantic cloisters such as worldly people imagine might shelter a despairing life. There were no Gothic arcades, no columns festooned with ivy, no moonbeams entering through the trefoil of a broken rose window and casting their light upon the inscription of a tomb; no chapel, with stained-glass windows, slender pillars, and traceried vaultings, forming excellent motives for a decoration or a panorama. The religious feeling which seeks to understand Christianity by its picturesque and poetic side would find in it no theme for descriptions after the manner of Chateaubriand. The building is modern and has not the smallest obscure corner in which to lodge a legend. Nothing satisfies the eyes, no ornaments, no fancy of art, no paintings, no sculptures; everywhere bare, straight lines. A white light illumines like a winter's day the pallor of the long corridors and the walls, cut by the symmetrical doors of the cells, and glazes with rippling beams the shining floors: everywhere gloomy severity, heedless of beauty, and careless of clothing the idea with a form. This dull architecture has the advantage of not distracting souls which must lose themselves in the contemplation of God. The windows are placed very high and are grated; between the

black bars one can get but a glimpse of the blue or gray sky outside. It is like a fortress built as a defence against the ambushes of the world. Solidity is sufficient; beauty would be superfluous. The chapel itself is but half opened to the devotions of the faithful outside. A huge screen rising from the ground to the vaulting and provided with thick green curtains, interposes like the portcullis of a fortress between the nave and the choir reserved for the nuns. Wooden stalls with sober mouldings polished by wear, run on either side; at the back, in the centre, are placed three seats for the Mother Superior and her two assistants. There the nuns come to hear divine service, their veils down, their long black dresses on which shows a broad strip of white stuff like the cross of a pall from which the arms have been cut, trailing behind them. From the trellised gallery of the novices I watched the nuns bow to the Mother Superior and to the altar, kneel down, prostrate themselves, and vanish into their stalls changed into prie-Dieu. At the elevation of the Host, the centre of the curtain opens somewhat and allows a glimpse of the priest performing the Holy Sacrifice at the altar, placed opposite the choir. The fervour of the worship edified me and confirmed my resolution to

break with the world to which I could not have returned. In this atmosphere of ecstasy and incense, in the trembling light of the tapers casting pale gleams upon these prostrate brows, my heart felt it was becoming winged, and tended more and more to rise to ethereal regions. The ceiling of the chapel turned azure and gold and in an opening of the heaven I seemed to see in a luminous cloud, the smiling angels bending towards me and signing to me to come to them. I saw no longer the ugly tint of the whitewash, the mediocre taste of the chandelier, and the meanness of the black-framed paintings.

"The time for the taking of my vows approaching, I was overwhelmed with the flattering encouragement, the delicate attentions, the mystic caresses, the hopes of perfect felicity lavished in convents upon young novices about to consummate their sacrifice and to give themselves forever to God. I did not need these helps; I could walk to the altar with a firm step. Forced — or at least, I thought so — to give you up, I regretted nothing in the world, save the affection of my parents, and my resolve never to re-enter it was unchangeable.

"I had passed the tests and the solemn day arrived. The convent, usually so peaceful, was filled with an

agitation which the severe monastic discipline repressed. The sisters came and went in the corridors, sometimes forgetting the phantom-like walk ordered by the rule; for the coming in of a new sister is a great event, and the entrance of a new lamb into the flock throws the whole fold into commotion. The worldly dress which the novice puts on for the last time is a subject of curiosity, joy, and astonishment; the satin, lace, pearls, and gems intended to represent the pomps of Satan are admired somewhat fearfully. Thus adorned, I was led to the choir. The Mother Superior and her assistants were in their places, and in the stalls the nuns were praying on bended knee. I spoke the sacred words which separated me forever from the living, and as the ritual of the ceremony requires it, I pushed aside with my foot the rich velvet carpet on which I had to kneel at certain moments. I took off my necklace and bracelets and undid my ornaments in token of my renunciation of vanity and luxury. I abjured the coquetry of women, which was not a difficult thing for me to do, since I had not had the joy to please you and to be beautiful in your eyes.

"Then came the most lugubrious and the most dreaded scene of the religious drama, — the moment

when the new nun's hair is cut off as a vanity henceforth useless. It recalls the dressing of the condemned; only, the victim is innocent, or at least purified by repentance. Although I had sincerely and from my heart given up all human bonds, I became pale as death when the scissors began cutting my long, fair hair, held up by one of the sisters. The golden curls fell in thick quantities upon the flags of the sacristy into which I had been led, and I gazed at them with dry eyes as they fell around me. I was terrified and felt a secret horror; the cold of the scissors, as they touched my neck, made me start nervously as if I felt the touch of the axe; my teeth chattered, and the prayer I strove to utter could not pass my lips. Ice-cold sweat, as that of one in agony, bathed my temples; my sight grew dim, and the lamp suspended before the altar of the Virgin semed to be vanishing in a mist; my knees sank under me, and I had only time to say, as I stretched out my arms as if clinging to emptiness, 'I am dying.'

"They made me breathe salts, and when I had regained my senses, amazed, like one emerging from the tomb, at the brightness of the day, I found myself in the arms of the sisters, who supported me placidly, accustomed as they were to such scenes.

"'It does not amount to anything,' said the youngest of the nuns with an air of sympathy. 'The most trying part is over. Recommend yourself to the Blessed Virgin, and all will be well. The same thing happened to me when I took the vows. It is the last effort of Satan.'

"Two sisters put on me the black dress of the order and the white stole, took me back to the choir, and cast over my head the veil, the symbolical shroud which made me dead to the world, and left me visible to God alone. A pious legend which I had heard stated that if one asked of Heaven a favour when under the folds of the funereal veil, it would be granted. When the veil was cast over me, I implored of the Divine goodness to allow me to reveal my love to you. It seemed to me, as I felt a sudden inward joy, that my prayer was granted, and I was greatly relieved; for that was my secret pain, that was the dagger in my heart, the thorn in my flesh which made me suffer night and day. I had given you up in this world, but my soul could not consent to keep its secret forever.

"Shall I tell you of my life in the convent? There day follows day exactly alike, every hour with its

devotion, its task; life moves on with equal step towards eternity, glad to approach the end. Yet the apparent calm often conceals much languor, sadness, and depression. Thoughts, although tamed by prayer and meditation, will wander off in reverie; the nostalgia of the world seizes upon you; you regret your liberty, your family, and nature; you dream of the great horizons filled with light, of the meadows diapered with flowers, of the swelling, wooded hills, of the blue smoke that rises in the evening over the fields, of the road traversed by carriages, of the river with its boats, of life, of motion, of joyous sounds, of incessant variety of objects. You would like to go out, to run, to fly; you wish you had wings like a bird; you turn in your tomb; in imagination you cross the high walls of the convent, and your thoughts return to the pleasant places, to the scenes of your childhood and your youth, which live again with magical vivacity of detail. You form useless plans for happiness, forgetting that the bolts of the irrevocable have been drawn upon you. The most religious souls are exposed to these temptations, remembrances, mirages, which the will represses, which prayer tries to dispel, but which nevertheless rise again in the silence and solitude of the cell with its

four white walls, whose sole decoration is a black wooden crucifix. The thought of you, put away at first in my early fervour, returned, more frequent and more tender; the regret of lost happiness oppressed me painfully, and often silent tears streamed down my pale cheeks. At night I would weep in my dreams, and in the morning find my coarse pillow wetted with bitter tears. In happier visions I found myself on the steps of a villa, after a drive, walking with you up a wide staircase on which the great neighbouring trees cast bluish shadows. I was your wife, and your caressing and protecting glance rested on me. Every obstacle that had come between us had disappeared. My soul did not consent to these fair imaginings, which it strove against as if they were sinful. I confessed them, I did penance for them. I sat up in prayer and I struggled against sleep to avoid these guilty illusions, but they ever returned. The struggle impaired my strength, which soon began to abandon me. Without being sickly, I was delicate; the harsh life of the cloister, its fasts, its abstinences, its macerations, the fatigue of the night services, the sepulchral chill of the church, the rigours of the long winter, against which I was ill protected by the thin

serge dress, and above all, the struggle in my soul, the alternate exaltation and despair, doubt and fervour, the fear of delivering to my Divine spouse a heart distracted by human attachments, and of suffering celestial vengeance — for God is jealous; and perhaps also the jealousy inspired in me by Mme. d'Ymbercourt — all these causes acted disastrously upon me. My complexion had become of a mat, waxy tint; my eyes, showing larger in my wasted face, shone with the light of fever in their dark orbits; the veins of my temples stood out in a network of darker azure; my lips had lost their fresh, rosy colour; my hands had become slender and transparent like the hands of a shadow. Death is not dreaded in the convent as it is in the world. In the convent it is joyfully welcomed, for it is the deliverer of the soul, the door opening into heaven, the end of the trials, and the beginning of beatitude. God withdraws to Himself earlier than others those He prefers, those He loves, and shortens their passage through the vale of sorrow and tears. Prayers full of hope in their funereal psalmody surround the deathbed of the dying nun, whom the sacraments purify of every terrestrial stain and on whom beams the splendour of the other world.

She is to her sisters an object of envy, and not of terror.

"I saw the fatal day approaching without fear. I hoped that God would forgive me my only love, so chaste, so pure, and so involuntary, and which I had endeavoured to forget as soon as it had appeared culpable in my own eyes. I hoped that He would receive me in His grace. Soon I became so weak that I would swoon away at prayers, and remain as if dead under my veil, with my face to the ground. My immobility was respected, for it was mistaken for ecstasy. Then, when it was seen that I did not rise, two sisters, bending towards me, would make me sit up like an inert body, and, their hands under my arms, would lead me, or rather carry me back to my cell, which before long I was unable to leave. I would remain for long hours on my bed, dressed, counting my beads with my thin fingers, lost in some vague meditation, and asking myself if my hope would be fulfilled after death. My strength was visibly ebbing, and the remedies proposed for my illness diminished my sufferings, but did not cure me. Nor did I wish to be cured, for beyond this life I had a hope long caressed, the possible realisation of which inspired

me with a sort of curiosity to enter the other world. My passage from this world to the other was most gentle. All the bonds between mind and matter had been broken except one, more tenuous a thousand times than the light cobwebs that float in the air of a fine autumn day; it alone held back my soul ready to open its wings in the breath of the Infinite. Alternations of light and shade, like the intermittent light of a night-light before it goes out, palpitated before my already dim eyes; the prayers murmured near me by the kneeling sisters, and which I tried to join in mentally, reached me only as a confused buzzing, as a vague, distant rumour. My deadened senses had ceased to perceive anything earthly; my thoughts, abandoning my brain, fluttered uncertain in a strange dream half-way between the material and the immaterial world, no longer belonging to the one and not yet pertaining to the other, while mechanically my fingers, pale as ivory, were rumpling and drawing up the folds of the sheet.

"At last my agony began, and I was stretched on the ground, a bag of ashes under my head, to die in the humble attitude which becomes a poor servant of God, giving back her dust to the dust. Breathing became

more and more difficult; I stifled; a feeling of fearful anguish racked my breast; it was the instinct of nature in me still fighting against destruction. But soon the useless struggle ceased, and with a faint sigh my soul was exhaled from my lips.

XII

HUMAN words cannot render the sensation of a soul which, freed from its earthly bonds, passes from this life into the next, from time into eternity, from the finite into infinity. My motionless body, already white with a mat whiteness, the livery of death, lay upon the funeral couch surrounded by the nuns in prayer; but I was as thoroughly freed from it as the butterfly is from its chrysalis, an empty shell, a shapeless form, which it abandons to open its young wings to the unknown light suddenly revealed to it. An interval of deepest darkness had been followed by dazzling splendour, by the broadening of the horizon, by the disappearance of every limit and every obstacle, and by the intoxication of inexpressible joy. The sudden accession of new sensations made me understand mysteries closed to terrestrial thought and organs. Freed from the frame of clay, no longer subject to the law of gravity, which but a moment before still fettered me, I sprang with

delighted eagerness into the unfathomable ether. Distance had ceased to exist for me, and my mere wish enabled me to be wherever I wished to be. More swiftly than light I soared in great circles through the illimitable azure of space, as if to take possession of immensity; crossing and recrossing on my way swarms of souls and spirits.

"The atmosphere was formed of an ever-burning light shining like diamond-dust, and I soon perceived that every grain of the dazzling powder was a soul. It was full of currents, eddies, billows, shimmerings like the fine dust that is spread over a sounding-board in order to study sonorous vibrations, and all these movements caused increased brilliancy in the splendour. The numbers which mathematics can furnish to calculators who venture into the depths of the infinite, cannot, with their millions of zeros adding their tremendous power to the initial number, give even an approximate idea of the tremendous multitude of souls which compose this effulgence, differing from the material light as much as day differs from night.

"To the souls that since the creation of our world and of other spheres, had already passed through the trials of life, were joined expectant or virgin souls,

awaiting their turn to be incarnated in a body on a planet belonging to some one system or another. There were enough of them to people for thousands and thousands of years all these worlds, the breath of God, which He will re-absorb by drawing back to Himself His own breath when He becomes weary of His work. These souls, though differing in essence and aspect according to the globe they were to inhabit, recalled, every one of them, in spite of the infinite variety of their types, the Divine type, and were made in the image of their Maker. Their constituent monad was the celestial spark. Some were white as the diamond; others were of the colour of rubies, emeralds, sapphires, topazes, and amethysts. For lack of terms intelligible to you, I make use of these names of gems, mere pebbles, opaque crystals black as ink, the most brilliant of which make but a dark spot against that background of living splendour.

"Sometimes there swept by a great angel, bearing an order of God to the very ends of the infinite, and making the universe oscillate by the beating of its vast wings. The Milky Way was poured out over the heavens in a great stream of glowing suns. The stars, which I beheld in their real form and size, so enormous that the

imagination of man cannot possibly conceive it, flamed with vast, terrific fulguration. Behind these and between them, at depths more and more vertiginous, I saw others and still others, so that nowhere was the end of the firmament visible, and I might well have believed myself enclosed in the centre of a prodigious sphere constellated internally with stars. Their light, white, yellow, blue, green, red, was of such intensity and brightness as to make the light of our own sun seem black, but the eyes of my soul stood it without the least difficulty. I came and went, ascended and descended, traversed in a second millions of leagues through the light of rainbow-like reflections, golden and silver irradiations, diamond-like phosphorescence, stellar outbursts, amid all the magnificence, all the beatitudes, all the ravishments of the divine life.

"I heard the music of the spheres, the echo of which struck the ear of Pythagoras; a mysterious harmony, the pivot of the universe, marked the rhythm. With a harmonious sound, as tremendous as thunder and as soft as the flute, our own world, borne away by its central sun, moved slowly through space, and with one glance I beheld the planets, from Mercury to Neptune, describing their ellipses, accompanied by

their satellites. A rapid intuition revealed to me the names by which they are known in heaven, acquainted me with their structure, with the thought and purpose of their creation; no secret of that prodigious life was concealed from me. I read as in an open book the poem of God, the lines of which were formed of suns. Would it were permissible for me to explain some of its pages to you! But you are still living in inferior darkness, and your eyes would be blinded by the dazzling effulgence.

"In spite of the ineffable beauty of this wondrous spectacle, I had not, however, forgotten earth, the poor habitation I had just left. My love, triumphant over death, followed me beyond the tomb, and I saw with divine voluptuousness, with radiant felicity, that you loved no one, that your soul was free, and that you might be mine forever. Then I knew what I had dimly felt before. We were predestined one for the other; our souls formed one of those celestial pairs which, when they unite, form an angel. But these two halves of the supreme whole, in order to meet in immortality, must have sought each other in life, divined each other under the veil of the flesh, through trials, obstacles, and distractions. I alone had felt the presence of my sister

soul and had hastened towards it, urged on by an unerring instinct. In you, perception, not so clear, had merely put you on your guard against vulgar bonds and loves. You had understood that none of the souls around you were intended for you, and passionate, though apparently cold, you had reserved yourself for a higher ideal. Thanks to the favour shown me, I could make you know the love which you had ignored during my life, and I hoped to inspire you with the desire to follow me within the sphere in which I dwell. I felt no regret, for what could the best of human ties be, compared with the happiness of two souls in the eternal kiss of divine love? Until the supreme moment arrived, my task consisted in preventing the world from engaging you in its ways, and separating you from me forever. Marriage binds in this world and the next, but you did not love Madame d'Ymbercourt. As a spirit I could read within your heart, and I had nothing to fear on this account; yet, not meeting the ideal you dreamed of, you might have become tired, and through fatigue, indolence, discouragement, or the need of changing your state of life, you might have allowed yourself to be drawn into that commonplace union.

"Leaving the fount of light, I flew earthward, where I saw your globe rolling beneath me in its foggy atmosphere, and its strata of clouds. I found you easily, and I watched over your life, an invisible witness, reading your thoughts and influencing them without your being conscious of it. Through my presence, which you did not even suspect, I drove away the ideas and caprices which might have turned you from the aim towards which I directed you. Little by little I detached your soul from every earthly bond; to keep you more safely, I cast over your home a mysterious spell which made you love it. When there, you felt around you a sort of faint, impalpable caress, and experienced inexpressible comfort. It seemed to you, though you could not account for it, that your happiness lay within the walls which I filled with life. The lover who, on a stormy night, reads his favourite poet, by a bright fire, while his sleeping mistress lies, her head on her arm, in the deep alcove, lost in pleasant dreams, feels just such deep happiness in the solitude of love. Nothing could induce him to leave; for his whole world is contained within that room. I had to prepare you gradually to behold me, and mysteriously establish relations with you. Between a spirit and an

uninitiated living being communications are difficult. A deep gulf separates this world from the other. I had crossed it, but it was not enough; I still had to make myself visible to your eyes, that were yet covered with a bandage and unable to perceive the immaterial through the opacity of matter.

"Mme. d'Ymbercourt, bent upon marrying you, attracted you to her home, and wearied you with her eagerness. Substituting my will for your sleeping thought, I made you write that reply to the lady's note in which your secret sentiments betrayed themselves and which caused you so much surprise. The idea of the supernatural awoke in you, and having become more attentive, you understood that a mysterious power had entered into your life. The sigh which I uttered when, in spite of my warning, you made up your mind to go out, faint and soft though it was, like the vibration of an æolian harp, troubled you deeply, and awoke hidden sympathy in your soul. You had recognised in it the note of feminine suffering. I could not then manifest myself to you in plainer fashion, for you were not sufficiently free from the bonds of matter. I therefore appeared to the Baron de Feroë, a disciple of Swedenborg and a

seer, to beg him to speak to you the mysterious words which put you on your guard against the peril you were running, and inspired you with the desire to penetrate into the world of spirits to which my love called you. You know the rest. Now am I to return to the regions above, or am I to remain here below, and will the shadow be happier than was the woman?"

Here the impulse that had driven Malivert's pen over the paper stopped, and Guy's power of thought, suspended for a time by the influence of Spirite, resumed possession of his brain. He read what he had just unconsciously written, and was strengthened in the resolve to love till death the charming soul which had suffered for him during her short stay upon earth.

"But what shall our relations be?" he said to himself. "Will Spirite take me away with her into the regions where she dwells, or will she hover around me, visible to me alone? Will she answer me if I speak to her? and how, in that case, shall I understand her?" These questions were not easy to answer, so Malivert, after having turned them over in his mind, gave up the effort and remained plunged in a deep reverie, from which Jack roused him by announcing the Baron de Feroë.

The two friends shook hands heartily, and the Swede with the pale golden moustache threw himself into an arm-chair.

"Guy, I have come very unceremoniously to breakfast with you," he said, stretching out his feet on the fender. "I went out early this morning, and on passing your house, I was seized with a fancy to pay you a visit almost as early as if I were an officer of the law."

"You were right,—it was a happy thought on your part," replied Malivert, ringing for Jack, to whom he gave orders to serve breakfast.

"My dear Guy, you look as if you had not gone to bed," said the Baron, as he saw the tapers that had burned down to their paper frills, and the sheets of writing spread out on the table. "You have been working during the night. Is it a novel or a poem? Shall you publish it soon?"

"It may be called a poem," replied Malivert, "but it is not of my own composition. I simply held the pen, led by an inspiration superior to my own."

"I understand," went on the Baron; "Apollo dictated and Homer wrote. Such verses are the best."

"The poem, if it be one, is not in verse, and it was no mythological god who dictated it to me."

"I beg your pardon. I forgot that you are a Romanticist, and that with you Apollo and the Muses must be left to Chompré's Dictionary or the 'Letters to Emily'!"

"Since you have been in some sort my mystagogue and my initiator into things supernatural, dear Baron, there is no reason why I should conceal from you that the writing which you take for 'copy,' to use the printer's expression, was dictated to me last night and the preceding night by the spirit who is interested in me and who appears to have known you on earth, for you are named in the story."

"You served as your own medium because relations are not yet well established between you and the spirit that visits you," replied Baron de Feroë; "but very soon you will be able to dispense with these slow and coarse means of communication. Your souls will know each other by thought and desire, without any external sign."

Jack now announced that breakfast was served. Malivert, quite upset by his strange adventure, by his love affair from beyond the tomb, that Don Juan would have envied, scarcely ate the food placed before him; Baron de Feroë did eat, but with Swedenborgian

sobriety, for whoever desires to live in communion with spirits must make the share of matter as small as possible.

"That is excellent tea you have, Guy," said the Baron. "It is the white-tipped, green-leafed tea plucked after the first spring rains, which Mandarins drink without sugar, steeping it in cups set in filigree holders to avoid burning their fingers. It is the drink, *par excellence*, of dreamers, for the intoxication it produces is purely intellectual. Nothing more quickly dispels human grossness and better predisposes to the vision of things hidden from the vulgar herd. Since you are now going to live in an immaterial sphere, I recommend you to drink this tea. But you are not listening to me, and I can easily understand your inattention. So novel a situation must strike you as very strange."

"Yes, I confess it," replied Malivert, "I am somewhat dazed, and constantly asking myself whether I am not a prey to hallucinations."

"Drive away these thoughts, for they would cause the spirit to fly forever. Do not seek to explain the inexplicable, but yield with absolute faith and submission to your guiding influence. The least doubt would

cause a break and entail eternal regret on your part. By special favour, but rarely accorded, souls that have not met in life may meet in heaven. Profit by the chance given you and show yourself worthy of such happiness."

"I shall indeed, and I shall not again inflict on Spirite the pain of which I was the innocent cause while she still dwelt in this world. But now that I think of it, in the story she dictated to me, that adorable soul has not told me the name which she bore upon earth."

"Would you like to know it? Go to Père-Lachaise, climb the hill, and near the chapel you will see a white marble tomb on which is carved a cross laid flat; at the intersection of the arms of the cross there is a wreath of roses with delicate marble leaves, a masterpiece by a famous sculptor. In the medallion formed by the wreath a brief inscription will tell you what I am not formally authorised to impart to you. The mute language of the tomb shall speak in my place, although, in my opinion, your curiosity is vain. What matters a terrestrial name when an eternal love is at stake? But you are not yet quite detached from human ideas, and I can understand it, for it is not so

long since you stepped outside the circle that bounds ordinary life."

Baron de Feroë took leave. Guy dressed, had his carriage brought round, and hastened to the shops of the most famous florists to purchase a quantity of white lilac. As it was winter, he found it difficult to obtain, but in Paris there is no such thing as impossibility when a man is willing to pay; so he bought his white lilac and ascended the hill with a beating heart and eyes full of tears.

A few flakes of snow, still unmelted, shone like silver tears upon the dark leaves of the yew-trees, the cypresses, the firs, and the ivy, and brought out with white touches the mouldings of the tombs, the tops and the arms of the funereal crosses. The sky was lowering, of a yellowish gray, heavy as lead, the right kind of a sky to hang over a cemetery, and the sharp wind moaned as it swept through the lines of monuments, made for the dead and exactly proportionate to human nothingness. Malivert soon reached the chapel, and not far off, within a border of Irish ivy, he saw a white tomb made whiter still by the light layer of snow. He bent over the railing and read the inscription engraved within the wreath of roses: "Lavinia d'Aufi-

deni, in religion Sister Philomena, died at the age of eighteen."

He stretched his arm over the railing, threw the lilacs over the inscription, and, although sure of having been forgiven, remained for a few moments by the tomb in a dreamy contemplation, his heart big with remorse; for was he not the murderer of that fair dove, that had so soon returned to heaven? While he was thus leaning on the railing of the monument, letting fall his hot tears upon the cold snow, that formed the second shroud of the virginal tomb, there was a break in the thick curtain of gray clouds. Like light shining through successive thicknesses of gauze which are gradually removed, the orb of the sun appeared less indistinct, of a pale white, more like the moon than the orb of day, the right sort of sun to light the dead. Little by little the opening grew larger and from it streamed a long sunbeam; it showed against the dark background of cloud, and lighted up and caused to sparkle under the mica of the snow, as under a winter dew, the mass of white lilacs and the marble wreath of roses.

In the luminous tremulousness of the sunbeam in which played icy dust, Malivert thought he made out,

like a vapour from a silver perfume-burner, a slender white form rising from the tomb, enveloped in the floating folds of a gauze shroud like the robes of an angel. The form made a friendly gesture to him with its hand, a cloud passed across the sun, and the vision disappeared.

Guy de Malivert withdrew whispering the name of Lavinia d'Aufideni to himself, re-entered his carriage, and drove back into Paris, which is filled everywhere with the living who do not even suspect that they are dead, for they lack the inner life.

XIII

FROM that day Malivert's life was divided into two distinct portions, the one real, the other spiritual. There was apparently no change in him. He went to the club and into society, he appeared in the Bois de Boulogne and on the Boulevard. If any interesting performance took place, he was present at it, and to see him dressed in good taste, with neat shoes and well fitting gloves, walking about through human life, no one would have suspected that the young man was in constant communication with spirits, or that, when he left the Opera, he gazed into the mysterious depths of the invisible universe. Yet on examining him more closely, it would have been noticed that he was more serious, paler, thinner, and spiritualised as it were. The expression of his face was no longer the same; unless he was drawn out of himself by others, it exhibited a sort of disdainful beatitude. Fortunately society never observes unless its interest requires it to do so, and Malivert's secret was not suspected.

The evening after his first visit to the cemetery where he had learned Spirite's terrestrial name, and while waiting for a manifestation which he desired with all the strength of his will, he heard, like drops of water falling within a silver basin, the sound of the notes of the piano. There was no one in the room; but prodigies no longer astonished Malivert. A few chords were struck in such a way as to command attention and awaken his curiosity. Guy looked towards the piano, and little by little there appeared in a luminous mist the lovely form of a young girl. At first the image was so transparent that objects behind it were visible through its contours, just as the bottom of a lake is visible through its limpid waters. Without becoming in the least material, it gradually condensed sufficiently to look like a living figure, but filled with such light, impalpable, aerial life that it resembled rather the reflection of a body in a mirror than the body itself. Certain sketches of Prud'hon, scarcely rubbed in with thin, vague contours, bathed in chiaroscuro and surrounded, as it were, with violet vapour, the white draperies seeming to be made of moonbeams, may give a faint idea of the graceful apparition then seated before Malivert's piano. The pale fingers,

faintly flushed, glided over the ivory keys like white butterflies, merely touching the keys but bringing out the sound, although the gentle contact would not have bowed the feather of a pen. The notes, without having to be struck, flashed out of themselves when the luminous hands fluttered above them. A long white dress of an ideal muslin infinitely finer than the Indian tissues which can be drawn through a ring, fell in abundant folds around her and foamed over her feet like snow. Her head, bent slightly forward as if a score were open upon the piano, enabled the neck to be seen with its curling, golden, shimmering, fine hair, as well as the upper portion of pearly, opaline shoulders, the whiteness of which melted into the whiteness of the dress. Between the bandeaux that rose and fell as if lifted by the wind, shone a narrow starry band, the ends of which were fastened on the chignon. From where Malivert sat, one ear and a portion of the cheek showed, blooming, rosy, velvety, of a tone that would have made the colour of a peach look earthy. It was Lavinia, or Spirite, to call her by the name she has borne hitherto in this story. She looked around rapidly, to make sure that Guy was attentive and that she might begin. Her blue eyes shone with a tender

light that penetrated his soul; there was still something of the maiden in that angelic look.

The piece that she played was the work of a great master, one of those inspirations in which human genius seems to foresee the infinite, and which now express so powerfully the secret desires of the soul, and again recall the remembrance of the heavens and the paradise from which it has been driven. It was full of ineffable melancholy, of ardent prayer, of low murmurs, last revolts of pride dashed from light into darkness. Spirite interpreted all these feelings with a *maestria* that made one forget Chopin, Liszt, Thalberg, those wizards of the piano. Guy seemed to be hearing music for the first time. A new art was being revealed to him. Innumerable new thoughts awoke within his soul; the notes stirred in him such deep, divine, interior vibrations that he felt he must have heard them in a former life that he had since forgotten. Spirite not only rendered all the intentions of the master, she expressed the ideal he had dreamed of, but which human infirmity had not allowed him to attain. She fulfilled his genius, she made perfection perfect, she added to the absolute.

Guy had unconsciously arisen and walked to the

piano like a somnambulist. He remained standing, leaning his elbow upon the corner of the instrument, his eyes gazing ardently at those of Spirite.

Her expression was truly sublime. Her head, uplifted and somewhat thrown back, showed her face illumined by the splendours of ecstasy. Inspiration and love shone with supernatural brilliancy in her eyes, the azure of which almost disappeared under the upper eyelid; her half-opened lips gleamed like pearls, and her neck, bathed in bluish transparencies like those of the heads in Guido's ceilings, swelled like the neck of a mystic dove. The woman was diminishing in her, the angel augmenting; and the intensity of light which she shed around her was so brilliant that Malivert was constrained to turn away his eyes.

Spirite noticed this, and in a voice more harmonious and sweeter than the music she was playing, she whispered, "Poor friend! I forgot that you are still confined within your terrestrial prison and that your eyes cannot bear the faintest ray of true light. Later I shall show myself to you such as I am, in the sphere whither you will follow me. Meanwhile the shadow of my mortal form suffices to manifest my presence to you, and you can contemplate me thus without peril."

By invisible gradations she returned from supernatural beauty to natural beauty; the wings of Psyche that had for a moment fluttered on her shoulders, disappeared again; her material appearance became somewhat more condensed, and a milky cloud spread about her suave contours, bringing them out more plainly, as water in which a drop of essence is thrown shows more clearly the lines of the crystal that contains it. Lavinia was reappearing through Spirite, somewhat vaporous, no doubt, but sufficiently real to cause an illusion.

She had ceased to play, and was looking at Malivert, who stood before her, — a faint smile playing on her lips, a smile of celestial irony, of divine archness, which mocked human debility while consoling it, while her eyes, purposely dimmed, still expressed the tenderest love, but such love as a chaste maiden might allow to be seen on earth by the man to whom she was engaged. Malivert might indulge in the belief that he was with the Lavinia who had sought him so earnestly while alive, and from whom he had always been separated by ironical fate. Carried away, fascinated, palpitating with love, forgetting that he had before him but a shadow, he advanced, and by an in-

stinctive motion sought to take one of Spirite's hands, still resting on the piano, and bear it to his lips; but his fingers closed on hers without touching anything, as if they had passed through a mist. Although she had nothing to fear, Spirite withdrew with a gesture of offended maidenliness; soon, however her angelic smile reappeared, and she raised to Guy's lips, who felt a soft freshness and a faint, delicious perfume, her hand made of transparent, rosy light.

"I forgot," she said, in a voice which was not formulated into words, but which Guy heard within his heart, "that I am no longer a girl, but a soul, a shadow, an impalpable vapour with nothing of human sense; so what Lavinia might perhaps have refused, Spirite grants, not as a pleasure, but as a sign of pure love and eternal union." And she left for a few seconds her hand under the imaginary kiss of Guy.

Soon she returned to the piano, and played an air of incomparable power and sweetness, in which Guy recognised one of his poems, — his favourite one, — transposed from the language of verse into the language of music. It was an inspiration in which, disdaining vulgar joys, he soared eagerly towards the higher spheres in which the poet's desire is at last to be satisfied.

Spirite, with marvellous intuition, rendered the unuttered words, the unphrased human speech, the unsaid in the best written verse, the mysteriousness, the depth, the secrecy of things, the unavowed aspirations, the indescribable, the inexpressible, the *desideratum* of thought incapable of greater effort, — all the softness, the grace, the suavity which overflow the too dry contours of words. To the fluttering wings that rose in air with such desperate rush, she opened the paradise of realised dreams, of fulfilled hopes. She stood on the luminous threshold, in a scintillation before which the suns turn pale, divinely beautiful and yet humanly tender, opening her arms to the soul thirsting for the ideal, which is the end and the recompense, the starry crown and the cup of love, — a Beatrix revealed beyond the tomb. In a phrase filled with purest passion she told, with divine reticence, and celestial modesty, that she herself, in the leisure of eternity and the splendour of the infinite, would satisfy all his unsatisfied desires. She promised to his genius happiness and love such as the imagination of man, even when in communion with a spirit, cannot conceive of.

While playing the finale, she had risen, her hands no longer even pretending to touch the keys; yet the

melodies escaped from the piano in visible coloured vibrations, spreading through the atmosphere of the room in luminous undulations like those which vary the flamboyant radiance of the aurora borealis. Lavinia had disappeared and Spirite reappeared, but taller, more majestic, enshrined in a brilliant light. Long wings fluttered on her shoulders; she had already, though plainly she desired to remain, left the floor of the room; the folds of her dress floated in space; an all-compelling breath bore her away, and Malivert found himself alone in a state of agitation easy to understand. But little by little he grew calm, and delightful languor followed upon the feverish excitement. He felt the satisfaction so rarely experienced by poets and, it is said, by philosophers, at having been understood in the most delicate and the deepest parts of his imagination. How brilliantly and radiantly Spirite had commented on that poem, the meaning and force of which he had never yet so well understood! How thoroughly her soul identified itself with his own, and her thought penetrated his!

The next day he made up his mind to work. His inspiration, which had abandoned him for a long time, was returning, ideas crowded in his brain, unlimited

horizons, endless perspectives opened before his eyes, a world of new sensations surged within his breast, and to express them he asked of speech more than it is able to do. The old forms, the worn-out moulds burst asunder, and sometimes the molten phrase broke forth and overflowed in splendid splashes like rays of broken stars. Never had he risen to such heights, and the greatest poets would willingly have signed what he wrote on that day.

As, having finished a stanza, he was thinking of the next, he allowed his glance to roam around the room and saw Spirite half lying on the divan, her chin resting on her hand, her elbow sunk in the pillow, her slender fingers playing in the golden waves of her hair. She was watching him with a loving, contemplative look. She seemed to have been there a long time, but had not cared to reveal her presence lest she should break in upon his work. As Malivert rose from his arm-chair to draw nearer to her, she signed to him not to move, and in a voice softer than any music, she repeated, stanza by stanza, line by line, the poem he had been writing. By a mysterious sympathy she felt her lover's thought, followed it in its flight, and even outstripped it, for not only did she see,

but she foresaw, and she said in full the unfinished stanza the end of which he was still seeking.

The poem, as will be readily understood, was addressed to Spirite. On what other subject could Malivert have written? Carried away by his love for her, he scarcely remembered earth, and plunged into the heavens as high and as far as wings attached to human shoulders could bear him.

"That is beautiful," said Spirite, whose voice Malivert heard within his breast, for it did not reach his ear like ordinary sounds. "It is beautiful, even for a spirit. Genius is truly divine, it invents the ideal. It sees higher beauty and eternal light. Whither can it not ascend when it has the wings of faith and love? But descend again, come back to the regions the air of which may be breathed by mortal lungs. Your nerves are trembling still like the cords of a lyre, your brow smokes like a censer, a feverish light burns in your eyes. Beware of madness, for ecstasy is akin to it. Calm yourself, and if you love me, live still your human life, for it is my wish."

In order to obey her, Malivert went out, and although men seemed to him only like distant shadows, like phantoms with whom he had nothing in common,

he tried to mingle with them, he endeavoured to interest himself in the news and rumours of the day, and smiled at the description of the wonderful costume worn by Mlle. —— at the last ball. He even agreed to play whist with the old Duchess de C——. Everything was equally indifferent to him.

But in spite of his efforts to cling to life, an amorous attraction drew him beyond the terrestrial sphere. He desired to walk and felt himself rise; he was a prey to irresistible desire. The apparitions of Spirite no longer sufficed him; his soul hastened after her when she disappeared, as if seeking to leave his body. Love, excited by impossibility, and burning yet with something of an earthly flame, devoured him and clung to his flesh as the poisoned tunic of Nessus clung to the flesh of Hercules. In his rapid contact with Spirite, he had been unable to entirely throw off the old Adam. He could not hold in his arms the aerial phantom of Spirite, but that phantom represented the image of Lavinia with an illusion of beauty that sufficed to blind his passion and to make him forget that the adorable form, the loving eyes, the sweetly smiling mouth, were, after all, but a shadow and a reflection.

At all hours of the day and night Guy beheld before him the *alma adorata*, sometimes as a pure ideal in the splendour of Spirite, sometimes in the more humanly feminine appearance of Lavinia. Now she soared above his head with the dazzling flight of an angel, again she seemed seated in the great arm-chair, lying on the divan, or leaning on the table. She appeared to look at the papers scattered on his desk, to breathe the scent of the flowers in the jardinière, to open the books, to move the rings in the onyx cup placed on the mantelpiece, and to give herself up to the puerilities of passion allowable to a young girl who has entered by chance the room of her betrothed. Spirite enjoyed showing herself to Guy such as Lavinia would have been had fate favoured her love. She was living again, after death, and chapter by chapter, her chaste boarding-school girl romance. With a little coloured vapour she reproduced her dresses of old, placed in her hair the same flower, or the same ribbon ; her shadow assumed once more the same grace, the same attitude, and the poses of her maidenly body. She had wished, moved by a coquetry that proved the woman had not wholly disappeared in the angel, that Malivert should love her not only with the posthumous love addressed to Spirite,

but as she had been during her life on earth, when at the Opera, in ball-rooms, in society, she sought the ever missed opportunity of meeting him.

Had not his lips touched but a void when, carried away by desire, mad with love, drunk with passion, he indulged in some useless caress, he might have believed that he, Guy de Malivert, had really married Lavinia d'Aufideni, so clear, coloured, and living did the vision become at times. In a perfectly consonant sympathy he heard internally, but as in a real conversation, the voice of Lavinia with its youthful, fresh, silvery timbre, answering his burning confessions by chaste and modest caresses.

It was indeed the torture of Tantalus; the cup full of ice-water was held to his burning lips by a loving hand, but he could not even touch the edge; the perfumed grapes, the colour of amber and rubies, hung over his head, but vanished as they evaded an impossible touch. The short intervals during which Spirite left him, recalled no doubt by some invincible order pronounced in that place where one can what one wills, had become unbearable to him, and when she disappeared he felt like dashing out his brains against the wall that closed upon her.

One evening he said to himself: "Since Spirite cannot put on an earthly frame and mingle in my life otherwise than as a vision, what if I were to cast off this troublesome mortal coil, this gross, heavy shape, which prevents my rising with the adored soul into the spheres where spirits dwell?"

The idea struck him as sound. He rose and selected from a trophy of barbaric weapons hanging from the wall, — tomahawks, assegais, boarding cutlasses, — an arrow feathered with parrot feathers and tipped with a sharp head of fishbone. The arrow had been dipped in curare, that terrible poison of which South American Indians alone possess the secret, and which kills the victim without any antidote being able to save him.

He was holding the arrow close to his hand and was about to prick himself with it, when suddenly Spirite appeared to him, terrified, horror-struck, and supplicating, casting around his neck her shadowy arms with a movement of mad passion, pressing him to her phantom heart, covering him with impalpable kisses. The woman had forgotten that she was only a spirit.

"Unfortunate Guy!" she cried. "Do not do that! Do not kill yourself to join me! Your death thus

brought about would separate us hopelessly, and would open between us abysses that millions of years would not enable us to cross. Recover yourself! Bear with life, the longest term of which does not last more than a grain of sand. In order to endure the time, think of the eternity during which we can ever love each other, and forgive my coquetry. The woman wished to be loved as the spirit was; Lavinia was jealous of Spirite, and I nearly lost you forever."

Resuming her angelic form, she stretched out her hands above Malivert's head, who felt celestial calm and coolness descending upon him.

XIV

MME. D'YMBERCOURT was surprised at the little effect that her flirtation with M. d'Aversac had had upon Guy de Malivert. Her lack of success entirely upset all her ideas of feminine strategy. She believed that nothing could revive love so well as a touch of jealousy, but she forgot that love had first to exist. She had taken it for granted that a young fellow who had called pretty regularly on her Wednesdays for the past three years, who sometimes brought her a bouquet on opera nights and remained awake at the back of her box, must necessarily be somewhat in love with her. Was she not beautiful, elegant, and rich? Did she not play the piano like a prize-winner at the Conservatory? Did she not pour out tea as correctly as Lady Penelope herself? Did she not write her morning notes in an English hand, long, sloping, angular, and thoroughly aristocratic? What objection could be made to her carriages purchased from Binder, her

horses bought from and warranted by Crémieux? Were her footmen not handsome fellows, and did they not bear the appearance of aristocratic lackeys? Did not her dinners deserve to be approved by experts? It seemed to her that all these things formed a very comfortable ideal. Nevertheless, the lady in the sleigh whom she had caught sight of at the Bois de Boulogne bothered her considerably, and several times she had driven around the lake with the idea of meeting her and seeing whether she was followed by Malivert. The lady, however, did not reappear, and Mme. d'Ymbercourt's jealousy had nothing to work upon. Besides, no one knew her or had seen her. Was Guy in love with her, or had he simply yielded to curiosity when he drove Grimalkin in pursuit of the stepper? Mme. d'Ymbercourt could not make it out; so she concluded that she had frightened away Guy by her suggestion that he was compromising her. She now regretted having uttered the remark, which she had made only to induce him to declare himself formally, for Guy, much too faithful to his orders, and, besides, taken up with Spirite, had refrained from calling on her. His complete obedience piqued the Countess, who would have preferred to have him less submissive.

Although her suspicions had no other foundation than the brief vision in the Bois de Boulogne, she felt that there was some love concealed behind this excessive care for her reputation. Yet apparently nothing was changed in Guy's life, and Jack, secretly questioned by Mme. d'Ymbercourt's maid, had assured her that he had not for a long time heard the faintest rustle of silk on the private stairs of his master, who, besides, went out very little, saw scarcely any one but Baron de Feroë, lived like a hermit, and spent the greater part of his nights in writing.

D'Aversac increased his attentions, and Mme. d'Ymbercourt accepted them with the tacit gratitude of a woman who feels somewhat abandoned and needs to be reassured as to the effect of her charms by new worship. She was not in love with d'Aversac, but she was grateful to him for prizing what Guy seemed to disdain; so on the Tuesday at the performance of "La Traviata" it was noticed that Malivert's seat was occupied by d'Aversac in white gloves and white necktie, a camellia in his buttonhole, curled and pomaded like a lady-killer who still has hair of his own, and radiant with self-satisfaction. He had long nourished the hope of making an impression upon

Mme. d'Ymbercourt, but the marked preference she accorded to Guy de Malivert had thrown him into the background among the indifferent adorers who crowd more or less round a pretty woman waiting for an opportunity, a break, or a fit of annoyance which never occurs. He was full of smiling attentions. He held out to her her glasses or her programme, smiled at her least remarks, bowed mysteriously in answer, and when Mme. d'Ymbercourt brought together the tips of her white gloves to approve some note sung by the *diva*, he applauded heartily, raising his hands as high as his head. In a word, he publicly took possession of his office of attendant lover.

In some of the boxes people were already beginning to say, "Is the marriage of Malivert and Mme. d'Ymbercourt off?" There was a slight manifestation of curiosity when Guy showed at the entrance of the orchestra stalls after the first act, and when he was seen, as he inspected the hall, to glance at the Countess's box. D'Aversac, who had also caught sight of him, felt a little uneasy, but the most perspicacious examination failed to notice the least sign of contrariety on Malivert's face. He neither blushed nor turned pale; his brows did not bend, not a muscle of

his face moved; he did not have the terribly grim aspect of a jealous lover at the sight of his fair courted by another; he looked perfectly calm and utterly serene. The expression of his face was that which comes from the radiancy of a secret joy, and on his lips fluttered, as the poet says, —

"The mysterious smile of inward delight."

"If Guy were loved by a fairy or a princess, he could not look more triumphant," said an old habitué of the balcony, a Don Juan *emeritus*. "If Mme. d'Ymbercourt cares for him, she may as well give him up, for she will never call herself Mme. de Malivert."

Between the acts Guy paid a short visit to the Countess's box to bid her farewell, for he was about to start on a trip to Greece. He was naturally polite to d'Aversac, without any trace of exaggeration, nor did he have the coldly ceremonious look which people assume when they are vexed. He shook hands very quietly with Mme. d'Ymbercourt, whose face betrayed her emotion, great as was the effort which she made to appear indifferent. The blush which suffused her cheeks when Guy left his box to come to her stall had been replaced by a pallor of which rice powder was wholly

innocent. She had looked for annoyance, anger, a movement of passion, a mark of jealousy, perhaps even a quarrel. His genuine coolness upset her and caught her unprepared. She had believed that Malivert loved her, and now she saw that she had been mistaken. This discovery wounded at once her pride and her heart. Guy had inspired her with a livelier affection than she knew, and she felt unhappy. The comedy that she had been playing, now that it was proved useless, wearied and bored her. When Malivert had gone, she leaned upon the edge of the box and replied only in monosyllables to the compliments addressed to her by d'Aversac, who was very much put out by her silence and her coolness. He did not understand how it was that winter had succeeded spring; the sudden frost withered the roses. "Have I said or done anything foolish?" asked of himself the poor fellow who a moment ago was so well received. "Can it be that she is making fun of me? Guy's ease of manner just now was affected, and the Countess seemed very much moved. I wonder if she still loves Malivert."

However, as d'Aversac knew that he was being watched by a certain number of glasses, he went on playing his part, and bent towards the countess, whis-

pering in her ear with an intimate and mysterious air commonplaces that anybody might have listened to.

The old habitué, who was very much amused by this little drama, followed the incidents of it out of the corner of his eye. " D'Aversac is putting a good face on his ill luck, but he is not the man for such a game. However, he is a fool, and fools are sometimes lucky with women. Cupid gets along very well with folly, and Laridon succeeds Cæsar, especially when Cæsar does not care for his empire. But who can be Guy's new mistress?" Such were the reflections of the veteran Cytherean, as well up in theory as he had been in practice, while he followed Malivert's glances to see whether they rested upon any of the beautiful women who shone in the boxes like jewels in a case. Could it be that vaporous blonde with the wreath of silver leaves, the water-green dress, and opal ornaments, who seemed to have touched up her complexion with a moonbeam like a wraith or a nixie, and who gazed sentimentally at the chandelier as if it were the orb of night? Or was it the brunette with hair darker than night, with a profile carved out of marble, eyes like black diamonds, red lips, so living under her warm pallor, so passionate under her statuesque calm, and

who might be taken for the daughter of the Venus of Milo, if that divine masterpiece deigned to have children. No, it was neither of them, neither the moon nor the sun. The Russian princess in the stage-box yonder, with her extraordinary dress, her exotic beauty, and her extravagant grace, might have some chance, for Guy was rather fond of eccentricity, and his travels had inspired him with rather barbaric tastes. Yet it was not she either; Guy had just looked at her as coldly as if he were examining a malachite coffer. Why might it not be the Parisian in the open box, dressed in perfect taste, clever, witty, pretty, whose every motion seemed to follow the sound of a flute and to raise a foam of lace, as if she were dancing on a panel in Herculaneum. Balzac would have devoted thirty pages to the description of such a woman, and it would have been style used to good purpose. She was worth it. But Guy was not civilised enough to taste the charm which seduced, even more than did beauty, the author of the "Comédie Humaine." — "Well, I shall have to give up fathoming this mystery to-day," said the old beau, as he put back into his case a pair of glasses that looked like siege guns. "The lady that occupies Malivert's thoughts is undoubtedly not here."

As people left the house d'Aversac was standing under the balustrade in as elegant an attitude as can be assumed by a gentleman wrapped up in a great-coat. He was by the side of Mme. d'Ymbercourt, who had thrown over her dress a pelisse of satin edged with swan's-down, the hood of which fell back on her shoulders and left her head bare. The countess was pale, and that evening she was really beautiful. The pain she felt imparted to her face, usually coldly regular, an expression and a feeling of life it had lacked hitherto. For the rest, she seemed to have wholly forgotten her escort, who remained within a couple of paces of her with a set gravity that sought to dissimulate and to express much.

"What is the matter with Mme. d'Ymbercourt to-night?" said a young man who stood in the vestibule to watch the procession of beauties; "she seems to have acquired a new beauty. D'Aversac is a lucky fellow."

"Not so very lucky, after all," said a young man with a clever, intelligent face, who looked like a portrait of Van Dyck taken from its frame. "It is not he who has given to the Countess's face, usually as inexpressive as a wax mask moulded on a Venus by

Canova, the animation and the accent you notice. The spark comes from elsewhere. D'Aversac is not the Prometheus of this Pandora; wood cannot give life to marble."

"Never mind," replied another; "I wonder at Malivert giving up the Countess just at this time. She deserves rather better than d'Aversac to avenge her. I do not know if Guy can find a handsomer woman, and he may have cause to repent his disdain."

"It would be a mistake in him to do so," replied the Van Dyck portrait. "Pray follow me. Mme. d'Ymbercourt is handsomer to-day than usual because she is moved. Now, if Malivert had not given her up, she would not feel any emotion, and her classical features would remain insignificant. The phenomenon which surprises you would, therefore, not have taken place; so Malivert is right to go off to Greece, as he said last night at the club he would do. *Dixi.*"

The footman announcing the Countess's carriage put an end to this conversation, and more than one young fellow committed the sin of envy on seeing d'Aversac get into the coupé with Mme. d'Ymbercourt. The door was closed by the lackey, who climbed to

the box in a twinkling, and the carriage went off at full speed. D'Aversac, half hidden in the folds of satin, close to his partner, breathing in the vague scent she gave out, tried to profit by the short tête-à-tête and to say a few tenderly gallant words to the Countess. He had to find at once something decisive and passionate, for there was no great distance from the Place Ventadour to the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin; but Guy's rival was not good at improvisation, and besides, it must be confessed that he received scant encouragement from Mme. d'Ymbercourt, who, silent and nestling in the corner of the coupé, was biting the corner of her lace handkerchief. While d'Aversac was laboriously trying to work out a loving phrase, Mme. d'Ymbercourt, who had not listened to a single word of it, busy as she was following out her own thoughts, caught him suddenly by the arm and said to him sharply, "Do you know who is the new mistress of M. de Malivert?"

This unexpected and astonishing question greatly shocked d'Aversac. It was not wholly proper, and it proved that the Countess had not thought of him for a moment. The castle in Spain of his hopes fell in ruins before this breath of passion.

"I do not know," stammered d'Aversac; "but if I did, discretion — and politeness — would prevent — Any well-bred man on such occasions knows what is his duty —"

"Yes, yes," answered the Countess, in short, sharp accents. "Men stand by each other even when they are rivals. I shall not learn anything." Then, after a short silence, partly mastering herself, she said, "I beg your pardon, my dear M. d'Aversac. I am terribly nervous to-night, and I feel that I am saying absurd things. Do not be angry with me, and come to see me to-morrow, — I shall be quieter. Here I am at home," she said, holding out her hand to him. "Where is my coachman to take you?" And with a rapid step she got out of the coupé and ascended the stairs without allowing d'Aversac to assist her.

So it may be seen that it is not always as pleasant as naïve young fellows imagine to take home a beautiful lady, and even to ride in her carriage from the Opera to the Chaussée d'Antin. D'Aversac, rather sat upon, had himself driven to the club in the Rue de Choiseul where his own carriage was awaiting him. He played and lost some hundred louis, which did not help to improve his temper. As he returned home,

he said to himself, "How the devil does Malivert manage to make all the women fall in love with him?"

Mme. d'Ymbercourt, after giving herself up to the care of her maid, who undressed her and made her ready for the night, put on a wrapper of white cashmere, and leaned on a desk, her hand plunged in her hair. She remained thus for some time, her eyes fixed on the paper, turning her pen in her fingers. She wished to write to Guy, but it was a difficult matter. Her thoughts, which crowded in her brain, disappeared when she tried to express them in a phrase. She scribbled five or six notes, crossed, interlined, illegible, in spite of her beautiful English hand, without managing to satisfy herself. She said either too much or too little, she did not succeed in expressing the feelings in her heart. She tore up and threw into the fire every note, and finally managed to produce this: —

"Do not be angry, dear Guy, at my coquettish impulse, a very innocent one, I assure you, for my sole object was to make you a little bit jealous and to bring you back to me. You know very well that I love you, although you do not love me very much. Your cold, quiet look froze my very heart. Forget what I

have said to you. It was a wicked friend who made me speak. Are you really going off to Greece? Do you really need to flee from me, who have no other thought than to please you? Do not go; your absence would make me too wretched."

The Countess signed the note "Cecilia d'Ymbercourt," sealed it with her arms, and wished to send it at once, but as she rose to summon her attendant, the clock struck two. It was too late to send a man to the very end of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where Guy lived. "Never mind," she said, "I will send my note very early and Guy shall have it when he wakes, if only he is not then gone."

She went to bed tired and worn out, closing her eyes in vain. She thought of the lady in the sleigh and said that Malivert loved her, and jealousy drove its sharp fangs into her heart. At last she fell asleep, but her sleep was agitated; she constantly started awake, worse than the night before. A little lamp hung from the ceiling by her, the night-light fixed in a globe of blue ground-glass cast in the room an azure light like that of the moon, and lighted with soft, mysterious beam the head of the Countess, whose loosened hair spread out in great black ringlets on the white

pillow, concealing one of her arms hanging out of the bed.

At the bed-head, little by little a faint, transparent, bluish vapour like the smoke from a perfume-burner gradually condensed, assumed more decided contours, and soon showed as a young girl of celestial beauty, whose golden hair formed a luminous aureole around her. Spirite, for it was she, watched the sleeping woman with the air of melancholy pity that angels must wear on beholding human suffering. Bending towards her like the shadow of a dream, she let fall upon her brow two or three drops of a sombre liquor contained in a little flagon like the lacrymatory urns found in the tombs of antiquity, whispering meanwhile: "Since you are no longer a danger to him whom I love, and can no longer separate his soul from mine, I take pity on you, for you are suffering on his account, and I bring you the divine nepenthe. Forget and be happy, O you who caused my death!"

The vision disappeared. The features of the lovely sleeper softened as if a pleasant dream had succeeded to a painful nightmare. A faint smile fluttered over her lips, by an unconscious movement she drew back under the clothes her beautiful arm, which was as cold

and white as marble, and covered herself up under the light eider-down quilt. Her tranquil and restorative sleep lasted until morning, and when she awoke, the first thing she noticed was her letter upon the table.

"Shall I have this letter taken?" said Aglaë, who had just entered the room to open the curtains, and saw her mistress's glance rest upon the note.

"Oh, no!" cried Mme. d'Ymbercourt, quickly, "throw it into the fire." Then she added to herself, "What was I thinking of to write such a letter? I must have been crazy."

XV

THE steamer from Marseilles to Athens was off Cape Malia, the last dentellation of the mulberry leaf which forms the point of Greece and has given it its modern name. Fog and cloud had been left behind. It was a passing from night to light, from cold to warmth. The gray tints of the Western skies had been succeeded by the azure of the Oriental heavens, and the sea, of a deep blue, rose and fell softly under a favouring wind, which the steamer turned to advantage by setting its smoke-blackened jibs, like the sombre-coloured sails which Theseus hoisted by mistake when he returned from the isle of Crete, where he had slain the Minotaur. It was near the end of February, and already the approach of spring, so late with us, was felt in that happy clime beloved of the sun. The air was so balmy that most of the passengers, who had already got over sea-sickness, remained on deck watching the coast, of which they caught a glimpse through the blue haze of

evening. Above the darker zone rose a mountain still visible, on whose snowy summit yet gleamed a ray of light. It was Taygetus; which enabled the travelling bachelors of arts who knew a few lines of Latin to quote with satisfied pedantry the well-known verses of Virgil. A Frenchman who quotes correctly — which is rare — a Latin line, is very nearly as perfectly happy as it is possible for him to be. As regards Greek lines, that is a happiness reserved for Germans and Englishmen fresh from Jena or Oxford.

On the slatted benches and camp-stools that encumbered the stern of the ship were young ladies wearing overcoats with huge buttons, small hats with blue veils, their abundant brown hair enclosed in nets, their travelling-bags hung about their neck by a strap. They were looking at the coast shrouded in the evening shadows, with glasses strong enough to make out the satellites of Jupiter. Some, bolder and better sailors, were walking the deck with the stride that drill-sergeants and teachers of walking teach to British girls. Others were talking with gentlemen irreproachably dressed and of perfect manners. There were also Frenchmen, pupils of the School of Athens, painters, architects, who had won the prize of Rome and who

were going for inspiration to the sources of true beauty. These, with all the enthusiasm of youth, when it has hope before it and a small sum in its pocket, were joking, laughing noisily, smoking cigars and indulging in heated discussions on æsthetics. The reputations of the great masters of ancient and modern times were discussed, ridiculed or lauded; everything was admirable or absurd, sublime or stupid, for young men always go to extremes and know no middle way. They would never marry King *Modus* to Queen *Ratio;* that union takes place much later in life.

In this animated group was a young man draped in his mantle like a philosopher of the Portico, and who was neither a painter, a sculptor, nor an architect, but whom the travelling artists called in as arbitrator when a discussion ended in obstinate negation on either side. It was Guy de Malivert. His judicious and clever remarks proved that he was a true connoisseur, an art critic worthy of the name; and these very disdainful young fellows, who sneered at any one who had not handled the brush, the chisel, or the drawing-pen, as a *bourgeois*, listened to him with deference and sometimes even adopted his views. The conversation ended, for everything ends, even a discussion on the ideal

and the real, and the disputants, their throats rather dry, descended to the saloon to wet their whistles with a glass of grog or other warm and restorative drinks.

Malivert remained alone on the bridge. Night had fallen, and it was now quite dark. In the deep azure sky, the stars shone with a vivacity and a brilliancy no one can imagine unless he has seen the sky of Greece. Their reflections were lengthened in the water, making long wakes, just as if they were lights placed upon the bank. The foam, beaten up by the paddle-wheels, flashed like innumerable diamonds, that gleamed for an instant and then vanished in a bluish phosphorescence. The black steamer seemed to proceed through a sea of light. It was a sight that would have excited the admiration of the most obtuse Philistine, and as Malivert was not a Philistine, he enjoyed it to the full. It did not even occur to him to go down to the saloon, which is always sickeningly hot, and peculiarly objectionable when one leaves the fresh air; and he continued walking up and down the deck, moving around the Levantines installed on carpets or thin mattresses along the rail in the bows and among the coils of chains and ropes; sometimes he caused a woman,

believing herself unnoticed, to lower the veil she had drawn aside to enjoy the cool air of night.

Guy was keeping the promise he had made not to compromise Mme. d'Ymbercourt.

He leaned on the bulwarks and let himself float away into a reverie full of sweetness. No doubt, since Spirite's love had freed him from earthly curiosity, the trip to Greece had ceased to inspire him with as much enthusiasm as formerly ; he would have liked to have started on another voyage ; but he no longer thought of hastening his departure from the world into which his thought already reached. He was now aware of the consequences of suicide, and waited, not too impatiently, until the hour should come when he might fly away with the angel who visited him. Secure in his future happiness, he allowed himself to indulge in the sensation of the present, and enjoyed, like the poet he was, the superb spectacle of night. Like Lord Byron he loved the sea. Its eternal restlessness and its incessant plaint, even in hours of deepest calm, its sudden anger and its mad fury against the immovable obstacle had always struck his imagination, which saw in this vast turbulence a secret analogy with useless human effort. What he particularly loved in the sea was its

immense isolation, the unchanging, yet ever changing circle of the horizon, the solemn monotony and the absence of any sign of civilisation. The same billow that uplifted the steamer on its broad back had laved the hollow-sided vessels of which Homer speaks, yet no trace of the contact was left; the water had exactly the same tone that coloured it when it was traversed by the fleet of the Greeks. The proud sea does not preserve, like the earth, the marks of man's passage. It is vague, immense, and deep, like the infinite. Never, therefore, did Malivert feel happier, freer, and more self-possessed than when, standing in the bows of a ship, pitching and scending, he sailed into the unknown. Soaked by the foam that flew over the decks, his hair salt with the breath of the sea, it seemed to him as though he were walking upon the waters; and just as a horseman becomes identified with the speed of his steed, so he attributed to himself the swiftness of the vessel, and his thought hurried on to meet the unknown.

Spirite had silently descended like thistledown or snowflake close to Malivert, and her hand rested on the young man's shoulder. Although she was invisible to every one, it is possible to imagine the charming

group formed by Malivert and his aerial friend. The moon had risen broad and bright, making the stars pale, and the night had turned into a sort of blue day absolutely magical in tone, like the light in an azure grotto. One of her beams fell in the bows of the ship upon that Love and that Psyche, effulgent in the diamond scintillation of the foam, like two young gods on the prow of an antique trireme. Over the waters, with a perpetual luminous sparkling, spread a broad wake of silvery spangles, the reflection of the orb risen above the horizon and slowly ascending into the heavens. Sometimes the swart back of a dolphin, a descendant, perhaps, of the one that bore Arion, flashed through the shining wake and suddenly disappeared in the shadow, or else, in the distance, like a quivering red dot, appeared the light of a vessel. From time to time the shore of an island, showing of a deeper violet and soon passed, loomed for a moment.

"Undoubtedly," said Spirite, "this is a marvellous spectacle, one of the finest, if not the very finest, which the human eye can gaze upon; but it is nothing by the side of the wonderful prospects of the world which I leave to visit you, and where soon we shall fly side by side, 'like doves called by the same desire.' This sea,

which seems so vast to you, is but a drop in the cup of the infinite, and the pale orb which lights it, an imperceptible silver globule, is lost in the terrific immensity, like the meanest grain of sidereal dust. Oh! how I would have admired this sight with you, when I still inhabited the earth and was called Lavinia. But do not think that I am insensible to it, for I understand its beauty through your own feeling."

"You make me impatient to be in your world, Spirite," answered Malivert. "Eagerly I spring towards those spheres, of a dazzling splendour beyond imagination or speech, which we are to traverse together and where never again we shall be separated."

"Yes, you shall see them, you shall know their magnificence, their delight, if you love me, if you are faithful to me, if your thought never turns to anything lower, if you allow the impure and coarse human mud to fall within you as within still water. On that condition we shall be allowed to enjoy eternal union, the peaceful intoxication of divine love, of unintermittent love without weakness, without weariness, the ardour of which would melt suns like grains of myrrh cast on a fire; we shall be unity in duality, the ego in the non-ego, motion in rest, desire in fulfilment, freshness in

flame. To deserve these supreme felicities, think of Spirite who is in heaven, and do not think too much of Lavinia who sleeps yonder under her carved wreath of white roses."

"Do I not love you madly?" said Malivert; "with all the purity and ardour of which a soul still held to this earth is capable?"

"My darling," replied Spirite, "I am satisfied with you."

And as she spoke the words, her sapphire eyes were starred full of amorous promises, and a voluptuously chaste smile parted her adorable lips.

The conversation between the living man and the shadow was prolonged until the first gleam of dawn mingled its rosy tints with the violet beams of the moon, the orb of which was slowly paling. Soon a segment of the sun appeared above the horizon, and day came with a splendid rush. Spirite, an angel of light, had nothing to dread from the sun, and remained for a few moments in the bows of the vessel, radiant in the rosy light and fires of morning that played like golden butterflies in her hair, lifted by the breeze of the Archipelago. If she chose night by preference to appear to Malivert, it was because, the movements

of common human life being then suspended, Guy was freer, less noticed, and did not run the risk of being thought crazy on account of actions unavoidably eccentric in appearance.

As she saw Malivert pale and shiver in the chill of dawn, she said to him in a sweetly scolding way: "Go, you dear creature of clay, — do not struggle against nature. It is cold, the sea dew is falling on the deck and clinging to the rigging. Return to your cabin and sleep." And then she added, with a purely feminine grace: "Even sleep cannot separate us. I shall be with you in all your dreams, and take you whither you cannot go during your waking hours."

And as she had promised, Guy's sleep was filled with azure, radiant, supernatural dreams, in which he flew side by side with Spirite through an Elysian paradise, a mingling of light, of ideal vegetation and architecture, of which no words in our poor, scanty, heavy, imperfect speech can suggest even the remotest idea.

There is no need to describe in detail Malivert's impressions of travel; they have naught to do with this story, and besides, Guy, filled with his love and drawn by an inexorable desire, paid less attention than for-

merly to material things. Nature now appeared to him only in a vague, misty, splendid distance that served as a background to his fixed thought. The world was for him only the landscape of Spirite, and he thought even the finest prospects unworthy of this function. Nevertheless, the next day at dawn he could not repress a cry of admiration and surprise when, as the steamer entered the roads of the Piræus, he beheld the marvellous view lighted up by the rays of morn; Parnassus and Hymettus formed with their amethyst-coloured slopes the wings of the splendid setting of which Lycabetus, with its curious outline, and Pentelicus formed the background. In the centre, like a golden tripod upon a marble altar, rose on the Acropolis the Parthenon, illumined by the golden light of morn. The bluish tint of the distance, showing through the interstices of the fallen columns, made the noble form of the temple still more aerial and ideal. Malivert felt that shiver which comes from the feeling of beauty, and he understood then what, until that moment, had seemed obscure to him: the whole of Greek art was suddenly revealed to him, a Romanticist, in that rapid vision, — that is, the perfect proportion of the *ensemble*, the absolute purity of the lines, the

incomparable suavity of the colour formed of whiteness, azure, and light.

No sooner had he landed than, without troubling about his luggage, which he left in Jack's hands, he jumped into one of the coupés that, to the shame of modern civilisation, bear, in the place of the cars of antiquity, the travellers from the Piræus to Athens, along a road white with dust and bordered here and there by a few dust-covered olive-trees. Malivert's vehicle, broken-down and rattling, was carried along at a gallop by two small, thin, dapple-gray horses with hog manes, that looked like the skeletons, or rather, like clay models of the marble horses that prance on the metopes of the Parthenon. No doubt their ancestors had posed to Phidias. They were roundly lashed by a youth wearing a Palikar costume, who, perhaps, driving a more brilliant team might have carried off the prize for cars at the Olympic games.

Leaving the other travellers to invade the Hôtel d'Angleterre, Guy had himself driven to the foot of the sacred hill on which humankind, in the flower of youth, poetry, and love, heaped up its purest masterpieces, as if to present them to the admiration of the gods. He ascended the old Street of Tripods, buried

under shapeless huts, and trod with respectful feet the marble dust, coming at last to that staircase of the Propylæa, some of the steps of which have been set up as tombstones. He climbed through that strange cemetery made of a maze of uplifted stones, between the substructures, on one of which stands the small temple of the Wingless Victory, while the other serves as a pedestal to the equestrian statue of Cimon, and as a platform for the Pinacothek, where were preserved the masterpieces of Zeuxis, Apelles, Timanthes, and Protogenes.

He crossed the Propylæa of Mnesicles, a masterpiece worthy to serve as an entrance to the masterpiece of Ictinus and Phidias. He was filled with the sentiment of religious admiration. He was almost ashamed that he, a Western barbarian, should tread with his boots that sacred soil. Soon he found himself before the Parthenon, the Temple of the Virgin, the sanctuary of Pallas Athene, the noblest conception of Polytheism. The edifice rose in the serene blue air superbly placid and suavely majestic. Divine harmony ruled its lines, which sung the hymn of beauty on a secret rhythm. All sweetly tended to an unknown ideal, converged to a mysterious point, without effort, without violence,

sure of attaining it. Above the temple one felt soaring the thought to which the angles of the pediments, the entablatures, the columns aspired and seemed to wish to rise, imparting imperceptible curves to the horizontal and the perpendicular lines. The exquisite Doric columns, draped in the folds of their flutings and leaning somewhat back, made one think of chaste virgins languorously feeling vague desires. An atmosphere of warm, golden colour bathed the façade, and the marble, kissed by time, had assumed a creamy tint and something of a modest blush.

On the steps of the temple, between the two pillars behind which opens the door of the pronaos, Spirite stood in the pure Greek brightness so unfavourable to apparitions, on the very threshold of the clear, perfect, luminously beautiful Parthenon. A long white dress pleated in little folds like the tunics of the *canephoræ*, fell from her shoulders to the tips of her little white, bare feet. A crown of violets — of those violets the scent of which Aristophanes celebrates in one of his parabases — was placed upon the wavy bandeaux of her golden hair. Thus dressed, Spirite resembled one of the virgins of the Panathenæon, come down from her frieze. But in her blue eyes shone a light never

seen in eyes of white marble; to her radiant, plastic beauty she added the beauty of the soul.

Malivert ascended the steps and approached Spirite, who held out her hand to him. Then in a dazzling vision he beheld the Parthenon as it was in the days of its splendour. The fallen pillars were in their places, the marbles of the pediment, carried away by Lord Elgin, or broken by the Venetian shells, were grouped again, pure and intact, in their human and divine attitudes. At the door of the cella Malivert saw, seated upon its pedestal, the statue of gold and ivory, the celestial, the virgin, the immaculate Pallas Athene. But he cast only a rapid glance upon these wonders, and his eyes immediately turned to seek Spirite's eyes. Seeing itself disdained, the retrospective vision vanished.

"Oh!" murmured Spirite, "art is forgotten for love! His soul is becoming more and more detached from this earth. He is burning, he is being consumed! Soon, dear soul, your wish shall be fulfilled."

And the heart of the maid, still beating within the breast of the spirit, caused her white peplos to rise and fall.

XVI

A FEW days after his visit to the Parthenon, Guy de Malivert resolved to visit the beautiful mountains which he saw from his windows. He engaged a guide and a couple of horses, leaving Jack at the hotel, as useless and likely even to be in the way. Jack was one of those servants who are more difficult to satisfy than their masters, and whose disagreeable traits come out on a voyage. He had as many fads as an old maid, and considered everything abominable, — the rooms, the beds, the dishes, the wines; and exasperated by the wretched waiting, he would cry, "Ah, the barbarians!" Besides, if he did own that Malivert had some literary talent, he considered him in his own mind incapable of taking care of himself, and rather crazy, especially for some time past; he had therefore undertaken to watch over him. True, if Malivert frowned, he immediately resumed his old place, and Mentor, with a marvellous facility of metamorphosis, resumed the part of valet.

Guy put a sum of money in gold coins in a leather belt which he wore under his clothes, a couple of pistols in his holsters, and when he left did not name any definite day for his return, desiring to allow himself the freedom of the unforeseen, of adventure, of wandering as he pleased. He knew that Jack, accustomed to his disappearances, would not be alarmed, even if he were several days, or even several weeks late; he would be quite happy as soon as he had taught the hotel cook to prepare a beef-steak to his taste,—that is, brown outside and underdone inside, in the English fashion.

Guy's excursion, unless he changed his purpose, was not to take him beyond Parnassus, and not to last more than five or six days, but a month had gone by and neither Malivert nor his guide had reappeared; no letter had reached the hotel announcing a change of plans or a prolongation of the trip; the money he had taken with him must have been nearly expended, and his silence began to cause uneasiness.

"My master has not sent for funds," said Jack to himself one morning, as he ate a beef-steak cooked at last as he wanted it, and which he washed down with white wine of Santorin, very pleasant in spite of its

slightly resinous flavour. "It is strange, — something must have happened to him. If he were continuing his trip he would have informed me of the town to which I was to send money, since I have his purse. I hope he has not broken his neck down some precipice. It is an absurd idea of his to go riding all the time through dirty, ill-paved countries, queer places where one starves, instead of remaining in Paris, comfortably installed in a pleasant home free from insects, mosquitoes, and other abominable creatures which blister one all over. I do not mind during the fine season; I can understand a man going to Ville-d'Avray, Celles, Saint-Cloud, Fontainebleau, — no, not to Fontainebleau, there are too many painters; even then, I prefer Paris. People may say what they like, the country is made for peasants, and travelling for commercial travellers, because that is their business. But it gets to be pretty wearisome to be stuck in an inn to grow young again in a city where there is nothing but ruins to look at. What can our masters see in old stones? As if new, well-kept-up buildings were not a hundred times more pleasant to look at! There is no mistake about it, my master is very impolite to me. It is true I am his servant, and it is my duty to attend him, but

he has no right to make me die of weariness in the Hôtel d'Angleterre. Suppose some misfortune has happened to that dear master of mine, — after all, he is a kind master, — I should never get over it unless I found a better situation. I have a good mind to set out to look for him, — but in what direction? Who knows whither his fancy has taken him? No doubt into the most extravagant and most improbable spots, into break-neck places which he calls picturesque and of which he makes sketches as if they were worth looking at. Well, I will give him three days more to return home; after that time I shall have him drummed and posted at every street corner like a lost dog, with a promise of a handsome reward to whoever brings him back."

Acting up to his office of sceptical modern servant who makes great fun of the devoted and faithful old-fashioned valet, the worthy Jack was trying to blind himself to his very genuine anxiety. At bottom he loved Guy de Malivert and was greatly attached to him. Although he was aware that his master had put him down in his will for a very handsome sum which would secure him a comfortable home, he did not wish for Guy's death.

The hotel-keeper also began to be anxious, not concerning Malivert, whose bill was paid, but concerning the two horses which he had furnished for the expedition. As he mourned over the problematical fate of these two peerless animals, so sure-footed, so easy in their gait, so tender-mouthed, and which could be driven with a silk thread, Jack said to him impatiently, with an air of supreme disdain: "Well, if your two hacks are dead, you will be paid for them," — an assurance which restored the serenity of the worthy Diamantopoulos.

Every evening the guide's wife, a handsome and robust matron who might well have taken the place of the caryatid removed from the Pandrasion, and for which has been substituted a terra cotta reproduction, came to inquire if Stavros, her husband, had returned, either with or without the traveller. On hearing the reply, which was invariably in the negative, she would sit down on a stone at a little distance from the hotel, undo the false tress of fair hair which bound her black hair, shake it out, put her hands to her face as if she were going to scratch herself, utter sighs like a ventriloquist, and engage in all the theatrical demonstrations of antique grief. At bottom she was really not

very sorry, for Stavros was not much of a man, and a great deal of a drunkard, who beat her when he was tipsy, and gave her very little money, although he earned quite a sum by acting as guide; but she owed it to fashion to manifest proper despair. Gossip — which was not slander in this case — charged her with being consoled in her intermittent widowhood by a handsome, wasp-waisted Palikar with a bell-like fustanella that held at least sixty yards of fine pleated stuff, and a red fez with a blue silk tassel falling down to the middle of his back. Her grief, genuine or affected, expressed in hoarse sobs that recalled the barking of Hecuba, greatly bothered the worthy Jack, who although incredulous, was somewhat superstitious. "I do not like," he would say, "that woman who howls over her absent husband like a dog that scents death." And the three days which he had set as the extreme limit of Malivert's return having passed, he went to a magistrate and made his statement.

The most active search was undertaken in the direction probably followed by Malivert and his guide. The mountain was traversed in every direction, and in a hollow road was found the carcass of a horse lying on its side stripped of its harness, and already

half devoured by the crows. The horse's shoulder had been broken by a ball, and the steed had no doubt fallen with its rider. Around the dead animal the ground seemed to have been trampled as if in a struggle, but too many days had elapsed since the probable time of the attack, which had no doubt taken place several weeks before. There was little to be learned from the vestiges half-effaced by rain and wind. In a lentisk bush near the road a branch had been cut by a projectile; the upper part was hanging withered. The ball, which was that of a pistol, was found farther off in a field. The person assailed seemed to have defended himself. What had been the outcome of the fight? Probably fatal, since neither Malivert nor his guide had reappeared. The horse was recognised as one of the two hired by Diamantopoulos to the young French traveller. But for lack of clearer indications, the inquiry naturally came to a stop. Every trace of the aggressors and of the victim, — or rather, victims, for there must have been two, — was lost. The thread was broken at the very outset.

A detailed description of Malivert and Stavros was sent to every possible place where the direction of the roads might have taken them, but they had not been

seen anywhere. Their voyage had ended there. Perhaps the brigands had taken Malivert to some inaccessible cavern in the mountains in the hope of getting a ransom out of him; but on examination this theory proved absurd. The brigands would certainly have sent one of their number in disguise to the city to find means of handing to Jack a letter stating the conditions of the ransom, with a threat of mutilation in case of delay, and of death in case of refusal, as is the way in that sort of business. But nothing of the kind had occurred; no message had come from the mountains to Athens, and the brigands' post-office had not been utilised.

Jack, who was greatly worried at the idea of returning to France without his master, whom he might be supposed to have murdered, although he had never left the Hôtel d'Angleterre, did not know which way to turn, and more than ever cursed the mania for travelling which leads well-dressed men to gloomy places, where robbers in carnival costumes shoot them down like hares.

A few days after the search Stavros reappeared at the hotel, in a most pitiable condition, — wan, thin, worn, with a terrified, crazed look, like a spectre rising

from the tomb without having shaken off the dust of the grave. His rich and picturesque costume, that he was so proud of and which produced so marked an effect upon travellers in love with local colour, had been taken from him and replaced by filthy rags covered with the mud of the camping-places. A greasy sheepskin was drawn over his shoulders, and no one would have recognised in him the tourists' favourite guide. His unexpected return was at once reported to the magistrates, and he was temporarily arrested, for though well known in Athens and comparatively honest, he had left with a traveller and was returning alone, — a circumstance which judges are not apt to think quite natural. Nevertheless, Stavros succeeded in proving his innocence. His occupation of guide naturally would not admit of his destroying travellers by whom he profited ; and besides, he did not need to murder them to rob them. Why should he have waited by the edge of a road for victims when they followed him on the high road most willingly, and shared a sufficient quantity of their gold with him ?

But the story he told of Malivert's death was most strange and very difficult to believe in. According to him, while they were peaceably riding along the hollow

way at the place where the carcass of the horse had been found, an explosion of firearms was heard, followed almost immediately by another. The first shot had knocked over the horse ridden by M. de Malivert, and the second had struck the traveller himself, who by an instinctive movement had put his hand to his holster and fired a pistol-shot at random. Three or four bandits had sprung over the bushes to strip Malivert, and two others had made Stavros get off his horse, although he did not attempt resistance, knowing it to be useless.

So far the account was not very different from the usual highwayman stories, but the continuation was much less credible, although the guide swore to its truth. He claimed to have seen by Malivert, dying, whose face, far from expressing anguish or agony, beamed on the contrary with celestial joy, a figure of dazzling whiteness and marvellous beauty, which must have been the Panagia, and which placed upon the traveller's wound, as if to still his sufferings, a hand of light. The bandits, terrified by the apparition, had fled to a distance, and then the lovely lady had taken the dead man's soul and flown away to heaven with it.

Every effort to shake his account failed. The body

of the traveller had been hidden under a rock on the bank of one of the torrents always dry in summer, the bed of which was filled with rose-laurels. As for him, as he was a poor devil not worth killing, he had been first stripped of his handsome clothes, and then taken a long way into the mountains to prevent his revealing the murder, and had escaped only with the greatest difficulty. Stavros was set free, for if he had been guilty, it would have been very easy for him to have reached the islands or the Asiatic coast with Malivert's money. His return to Athens, therefore, proved his innocence.

The account of Malivert's death was sent to Mme. de Marillac, his sister, very much as it had been told by Stavros; even Spirite's apparition was mentioned, but as an hallucination of the terrified guide, whose brain did not seem sound.

Just about the time when the murder was being committed on Mount Parnassus, Baron de Feroë had withdrawn according to custom into his inaccessible rooms, and was busy reading that strange and mysterious work of Swedenborg entitled, "Marriage in the Other Life." While he was reading he felt a peculiar sensation, as when he was warned of a revelation.

The thought of Malivert crossed his brain, although it was not brought by any natural transition. A light showed in his room, the walls of which became transparent and opened like a hypætral temple, showing at an immense depth, not the sky beheld by human eyes, but the heavens which are beheld by seers. In the centre of a glory of light which seemed to issue from the depths of the infinite, two points of still greater intensity of splendour, like diamonds in a flame, scintillated, palpitated, and drew near, assuming the appearance of Malivert and Spirite. They floated side by side in a celestial, radiant joy, caressing each other with their wings and toying with divine endearments. Soon they drew closer and closer, and then, like two drops of dew rolling on the same lily leaf, they finally formed a single pearl.

"There they are, happy forever, their united souls forming an angel of love," said Baron de Feroë, with a melancholy smile. "But how long have I still to wait?"

The Vampire

THE VAMPIRE

YOU ask me, brother, if I have ever loved. I have. It is a strange story, and though I am sixty, I scarce venture to stir the ashes of that remembrance. I mean to refuse you nothing, but to no soul less tried than yours would I tell the story. The events are so strange that I can hardly believe they did happen. I was for more than three years the plaything of a singular and diabolical illusion. I, a poor priest, I led in my dreams every night — God grant they were dreams only! — the life of the damned, the life of the worldly, the life of Sardanapalus. A single glance, too full of approval, cast upon a woman, nearly cost me the loss of my soul. But at last, by the help of God and of my holy patron, I was able to drive away the evil spirit which had possessed me. My life was complicated by an entirely different nocturnal life. During the day I was a priest of God, chaste, busied with prayers and holy things; at night, as soon as I had closed my eyes, I became a young nobleman, a connoisseur of women, of horses and dogs, gambling, drinking, and cursing,

and when at dawn I awoke, it seemed to me rather that I was going to sleep and dreaming of being a priest. Of that somnambulistic life there have remained in my remembrance things and words I cannot put away, and although I have never left the walls of my presbytery, you will be apt to think, on hearing me, that I am a man who, having worn out everything and having given up the world and entered religion, means to end in the bosom of God days too greatly agitated, rather than a humble student in a seminary, who has grown old in a forgotten parish in the depths of a forest, and who has never had anything to do with the things of the day.

Yes, I have loved, as no one on earth ever loved, with an insensate and furious love, so violent that I wonder it did not break my heart. Ah! what nights! what nights I have had!

From my youngest childhood I felt the vocation to the priesthood and all my studies were therefore bent in that direction. My life until the age of twenty-four was nothing but one long novitiate. Having finished my theological studies, I passed successfully through the minor orders, and my superiors considered me worthy, in spite of my youth, of crossing the last dread

limit. The day of my ordination was fixed for Easter week.

I had never gone into the world. The world, to me, lay within the walls of the college and of the seminary. I knew vaguely that there was something called a woman, but my thoughts never dwelt upon it; I was utterly innocent. I saw my old, infirm mother but twice a year; she was the only connection I had with the outer world. I regretted nothing; I felt not the least hesitation in the presence of the irrevocable engagement I was about to enter into; nay, I was joyous and full of impatience. Never did a young bridegroom count the hours with more feverish ardour. I could not sleep; I dreamed that I was saying Mass; I saw nothing more glorious in the world than to be a priest. I would have refused, had I been offered a kingdom, to be a king or a poet instead, for my ambition conceived nothing finer.

What I am telling you is to show you that what happened to me ought not to have happened, and that I was the victim of the most inexplicable fascination.

The great day having come, I walked to the church with so light a step that it seemed to me that I was borne in the air, or that I had wings on my shoulders;

I thought myself an angel, and I was amazed at the sombre and preoccupied expression of my companions, — for there were several of us. I had spent the night in prayer, and was in a state bordering on ecstasy. The bishop, a venerable old man, seemed to me like God the Father bending from eternity, and I beheld the heavens through the vault of the dome.

You are acquainted with the details of the ceremony: the benediction, the Communion in both kinds, the anointing of the palms of the hands with the oil of the catechumens, and finally the sacred sacrifice offered in conjunction with the bishop. I will not dwell on these things. Oh! how right was Job, "Imprudent is he who has not made a covenant with his eyes"! I happened to raise my head, which until then I had kept bent down, and I saw before me, so close that I might have touched her, although in reality she was a long way off, on the other side of the railing, a young woman of wondrous beauty dressed with regal magnificence. It was as though scales had fallen from my eyes. I felt like a blind man suddenly recovering his sight. The bishop, so radiant but now, was suddenly dimmed, the flame of the tapers on their golden candlesticks turned pale like stars in the morning light,

and the whole church was shrouded in deep obscurity. The lovely creature stood out against this shadow like an angelic revelation. She seemed illumined from within, and to give forth light rather than to receive it. I cast down my eyes, determined not to look up again, so as to avoid the influence of external objects, for I was becoming more and more inattentive and I scarcely knew what I was about. Yet a moment later I opened my eyes again, for through my eyelids I saw her dazzling with the prismatic colours in a radiant penumbra, just as when one has gazed upon the sun.

Oh, how beautiful she was! The greatest painters had never approached this fabulous reality, even when, pursuing ideal beauty in the heavens, they brought back to earth the divine portrait of the Madonna. Neither the verse of the poet nor the palette of the painter can give you an idea of her. She was rather tall, with the figure and the port of a goddess. Her hair, of a pale gold, was parted on her brow and flowed down her temples like two golden streams; she looked like a crowned queen. Her forehead, of a bluish whiteness, spread out broad and serene over the almost brown eyebrows, a singularity which added to the effect of the sea-green eyes, the brilliancy and fire

of which were unbearable. Oh, what eyes! With one flash they settled a man's fate. They were filled with a life, a limpidity, an ardour, a moist glow, which I have never seen in any other human eyes. From them flashed glances like arrows, which I distinctly saw striking my heart. I know not whether the flame that illumined them came from heaven or hell, but undoubtedly it came from one or the other place. That woman was an angel or a demon, perhaps both. She certainly did not come from the womb of Eve, our common mother. Teeth of the loveliest pearl sparkled through her rosy smile, and little dimples marked each inflection of her mouth in the rosy satin of her adorable cheeks. As to her nose, it was of regal delicacy and pride, and betrayed the noblest origin. An agate polish played upon the smooth, lustrous skin of her half-uncovered shoulders, and strings of great fair pearls, almost similar in tone to her neck, fell upon her bosom. From time to time she drew up her head with the undulating movement of an adder or of a peacock, and made the tall embroidered ruff that surrounded her like a silver trellis tremble slightly. She wore a dress of orange-red velvet, and out of the broad, ermine-lined sleeves issued

wondrously delicate patrician hands, with long, plump fingers, so ideally transparent that the light passed through them as through the fingers of Dawn.

All these details are still as vivid to me as if I had seen her but yesterday, and although I was a prey to the greatest agitation, nothing escaped me; the faintest tint, the smallest dark spot on the corner of the chin, the scarcely perceptible down at the corners of the lips, the velvety brow, the trembling shadow of the eyelashes on her cheeks, — I noted all with astonishing lucidity.

As I gazed at her, I felt open within me doors hitherto fast-closed; passages obstructed until now were cleared away in every direction and revealed unsuspected prospects; life appeared in a new guise; I had just been born into a new order of ideas. Frightful anguish clutched my heart, and every minute that passed seemed to me a second and an age. Yet the ceremony was proceeding, and I was being carried farther from the world, the entrance to which was fiercely besieged by my nascent desires. I said "yes," however, when I meant to say "no," when everything in me was revolting and protesting against the violence my vow was doing to my will. An occult force dragged the words from my mouth in spite of myself.

It is perhaps just what so many young girls do when they go to the altar with a firm resolve to boldly refuse the husband forced upon them. Not one carries out her intention. It is no doubt the same thing which makes so many poor novices take the veil, although they are quite determined to tear it to pieces at the moment of speaking their vows. No one dares to cause such a scandal before everybody, nor to deceive the expectations of so many present. The numerous wills, the numerous glances, seem to weigh down on one like a leaden cloak. And then, every precaution is so carefully taken, everything is so well settled beforehand in a fashion so evidently irrevocable that thought yields to the weight of fact and completely gives way.

The expression of the fair unknown changed as the ceremony progressed. Her glance, tender and caressing at first, became disdainful and dissatisfied as if to reproach me with dulness of perception. I made an effort, mighty enough to have overthrown a mountain, to cry out that I would not be a priest, but I could not manage it; my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth and it was impossible for me to express my will by the smallest negative sign. I was, although wide-awake,

in a state similar to that of nightmare, when one seeks to call out a word on which one's life depends, and yet is unable to do so.

She seemed to understand the martyrdom I was suffering, and as if to encourage me, she cast upon me a look full of divine promise. Her eyes were a poem, her every glance was a canto; she was saying to me:

"If you will come with me, I will make you more happy than God Himself in Paradise. The angels will be jealous of you. Tear away the funeral shroud in which you are about to wrap yourself. I am beauty and youth and love; come to me, and together we shall be Love. What can Jehovah offer you in compensation? Our life shall pass like a dream, and will be but one eternal kiss. Pour out the wine in that cup and you are free. We will go away to unknown isles and you shall sleep on my bosom on a bed of massive gold under a pavilion of silver. For I love you and mean to take you from your God, before whom so many youthful hearts pour out floods of love that never reach Him."

It seemed to me that I heard these words on a rhythm of infinite sweetness, for her glance was almost sonorous, and the phrases her eyes sent me sounded

within my heart as if invisible lips had breathed them. I felt myself ready to renounce God, but my hand was mechanically accomplishing the formalities of the ceremony. The beauty cast upon me a second glance so beseeching, so despairing that sharp blades pierced my heart, and I felt more swords enter my breast than did the Mother of Sorrows.

Never did any human face exhibit more poignant anguish. The maiden who sees her betrothed fall suddenly dead by her side, the mother by the empty cradle of her child, Eve seated on the threshold of the gate of Paradise, the miser who finds a stone in place of his treasure, the poet who has accidentally dropped into the fire the only manuscript of his favourite work, —not one of them could look more inconsolable, more stricken to the heart. The blood left her lovely face and she turned pale as marble. Her beautiful arms hung limp by her body as if the muscles had been unknotted, and she leaned against a pillar, for her limbs were giving way under her. As for me, livid, my brow covered with a sweat more bloody than that of Calvary, I staggered towards the church door. I was stifling; the vaulting seemed to press down on me and my hand to upbear alone the weight of the cupola.

As I was about to cross the threshold, a woman's hand suddenly touched mine. I had never touched one before. It was cold like the skin of a serpent, yet it burned me like the print of a red-hot iron. It was she. "Oh, unfortunate man! unfortunate man! What have you done?" she whispered; then disappeared in the crowd.

The old bishop passed by. He looked severely at me. My appearance was startlingly strange. I turned pale, blushed red, and flames passed before my eyes. One of my comrades took pity on me and led me away; I was incapable of finding alone the road to the seminary. At the corner of a street, while the young priest happened to look in another direction, a quaintly dressed negro page approached me and without staying his steps handed me a small pocket-book with chased gold corners, signing to me to conceal it. I slipped it into my sleeve and kept it there until I was alone in my cell. I opened it. It contained but two leaves with these words: "Clarimonda, at the Palazzo Concini." I was then so ignorant of life that I did not know of Clarimonda, in spite of her fame, and I was absolutely ignorant where the Palazzo Concini was situated. I made innumerable conjectures of the

most extravagant kind, but the truth is that, provided I could see her again, I cared little what she might be, whether a great lady or a courtesan.

This new-born love of mine was hopelessly rooted within me. I did not even attempt to expel it from my heart, for I felt that that was an impossibility. The woman had wholly seized upon me; a single glance of hers had been sufficient to change me; she had breathed her soul into me, and I no longer lived but in her and through her. I indulged in countless extravagant fancies; I kissed on my hand the spot she had touched, and I repeated her name for hours at a time. All I needed to do to see her as plainly as if she had been actually present was to close my eyes; I repeated the words which she had spoken to me, "Unfortunate man! unfortunate man! what have you done?" I grasped the full horror of my situation, and the dread, sombre aspects of the state which I had embraced were plainly revealed to me. To be a priest; that is, to remain chaste, never to love, never to notice sex or age; to turn aside from beauty, to voluntarily blind myself, to crawl in the icy shadows of a cloister or a church, to see none but the dying, to watch by strangers' beds, to wear mourning for myself

in the form of the black cassock, a robe that may readily be used to line your coffin.

Meanwhile I felt life rising within me like an internal lake, swelling and overflowing; my blood surged in my veins; my youth, so long suppressed, burst out suddenly like the aloe that blooms but once in a hundred years, and then like a thunder-clap. How could I manage to see Clarimonda again? I could find no pretext to leave the seminary, for I knew no one in town. Indeed, my stay in it was to be very short, for I was merely waiting to be appointed to a parish. I tried to loosen the bars of the window, but it was at a terrific height from the ground, and having no ladder, I had to give up that plan. Besides, I could go out at night only, and how should I ever find my way through the labyrinth of streets? All these difficulties, which would have been slight to other men, were tremendous for me, a poor seminarist, in love since yesterday, without experience, without money, and without clothes.

"Ah, if only I had not been a priest, I might have seen her every day; I might have been her lover, her husband," I said to myself in my blindness. Instead of being wrapped in my gloomy shroud, I should have

worn silk and velvet, chains of gold, a sword and a plume, like handsome young cavaliers. My hair, instead of being dishonoured by a broad tonsure, would have fallen in ringlets around my neck; I should have worn a handsome waxed moustache; I should have been a valiant man. A single hour spent before an altar, a few words scarcely breathed, had cut me off forever from the living; I had myself sealed the stone of my tomb; I had pushed with my own hand the bolts of my prison door.

I looked out of the window. The heavens were wondrously blue, the trees had assumed their spring-time livery, nature exhibited ironical joy. The square was full of people coming and going. Young dandies and young beauties in couples were going towards the gardens and the arbours; workmen passed by, singing drinking songs; there was an animation, a life, a rush, a gaiety, which contrasted all the more painfully with my mourning and my solitude. A young mother was playing with her child on the threshold of a door. She kissed its little rosy lips still pearly with drops of milk, and indulged, as she teased it, in those many divine puerilities which mothers alone can invent. The father, who stood a little way off,

was smiling gently at the charming group, and his crossed arms pressed his joy to his heart. I could not bear the sight. I closed the window and threw myself on my bed, my heart filled with frightful hatred and jealousy, and I bit my fingers and my coverlet as if I had been a tiger starving for three days.

I know not how long I remained in this condition, but in turning over in a furious spasm, I perceived Father Serapion standing in the middle of the room gazing attentively at me. I was ashamed of myself, and letting fall my head upon my breast, I covered my face with my hands.

"Romualdo, my friend, something extraordinary is taking place in you," said Serapion after a few moments' silence. "Your conduct is absolutely inexplicable. You, so pious, so calm, and so gentle, you have been raging in your cell like a wild beast. Beware, my brother, and do not listen to the suggestions of the devil. The evil spirit, angered at your having devoted yourself to the Lord, prowls around you like a ravening wolf, and is making a last effort to draw you to himself. Instead of allowing yourself to be cast down, dear Romualdo, put on the breastplate of prayer, take up the shield of mortification, and valiantly fight the

enemy. You will overcome him. Trial is indispensable to virtue, and gold emerges finer from the crucible. Be not dismayed nor discouraged; the best guarded and the strongest souls have passed through just such moments. Pray, fast, meditate, and the evil one will flee from you."

The father's discourse brought me back to myself, and I became somewhat calmer. "I was coming," he said, "to inform you that you are appointed to the parish of C——. The priest who occupied it has just died, and his lordship the Bishop has charged me to install you there. Be ready to-morrow."

I signed that I would be ready, and the father withdrew.

I opened my breviary and began to read my prayers, but the lines soon became confused; I lost the thread of my thoughts, and the book slipped from my hands without my noticing it.

To leave to-morrow without having seen her again! To add one more impossibility to all those that already existed between us! To lose forever the hope of meeting her unless a miracle occurred! Even if I were to write to her, how could I send my letter? Considering the sacred functions which I had assumed,

to whom could I confide, in whom could I trust? I felt terrible anxiety. Then what Father Serapion had just said to me of the wiles of the devil recurred to my memory. The strangeness of the adventure, the supernatural beauty of Clarimonda, the phosphorescent gleam of her glance, the burning touch of her hand, the trouble into which she had thrown me, the sudden change which had occurred in me, my piety vanished in an instant, — everything went to prove plainly the presence of the devil, and that satin-like hand could only be the glove that covered his claws. These thoughts caused me much terror. I picked up the breviary that had fallen to the ground from my knees, and I again began to pray.

The next day Serapion came for me. Two mules were waiting for us at the door, carrying our small valises. He got on one and I on the other as well as I could. While traversing the streets of the town, I looked at every window and every balcony in the hope of seeing Clarimonda, but it was too early; and the town was not yet awake. My glance tried to pierce through the blinds and curtains of all the palaces in front of which we were passing. No doubt Serapion thought my curiosity was due to the admiration

caused in me by the beauty of the architecture, for he slackened his mule's speed to give me time to look. Finally we reached the city gate and began to ascend the hill. When we reached the top, I turned around once again to gaze at the spot where lived Clarimonda. The shadow of a cloud covered the whole town; the blue and red roofs were harmonized in one uniform half-tint, over which showed, like flecks of foam, the morning smoke. By a singular optical effect there stood out bright under a single beam of light a building that rose far above the neighbouring houses, wholly lost in the mist. Although it was certainly three miles away, it seemed quite close; the smallest detail could be made out, — the turrets, the platforms, the windows, even the swallow-tailed vanes.

"What is that palace yonder lighted by a sunbeam?" I asked Serapion.

He shaded his eyes with his hand, and after having looked, answered: "That is the old palazzo which Prince Concini gave to Clarimonda the courtesan. Fearful things take place there."

At that moment, — I have never known whether it was a reality or an illusion, — I thought I saw on the terrace a slender white form that gleamed for a second

and vanished. It was Clarimonda. Oh! did she know that at that very moment, from the top of the rough road which was taking me away from her, ardent and restless, I was watching the palace she dwelt in, and which a derisive effect of light seemed to draw near to me as if to invite me to enter it as its master? No doubt she knew it, for her soul was too much in sympathy with mine not to have felt its every emotion, and it was that feeling which had urged her, still wearing her night-dress, to ascend to the terrace in the icy-cold dew of morning.

The shadow reached the palace, and all turned into a motionless ocean of roofs and attics in which nothing was to be distinguished save swelling undulations. Serapion urged on his mule; mine immediately started too, and a turn in the road concealed forever from me the town of S——, for I was never to return there. After three days' travelling through a monotonous country, we saw rising above the trees the weather-cock of the steeple of the church to which I had been appointed; and after having traversed some tortuous streets bordered by huts and small gardens, we arrived before the façade, which was not very magnificent. A porch adorned with a few mouldings and two or

three sandstone pillars roughly cut, a tiled roof, and buttresses of the same sandstone as the pillars, — that was all. On the left, the cemetery overgrown with grass, with a tall iron cross in the centre; to the right, in the shadow of the church, the presbytery, a very plain, poor, but clean house. We entered. A few hens were picking up scattered grain. Accustomed, apparently, to the black dress of ecclesiastics, they were not frightened by our presence, and scarcely moved out of the way. A hoarse bark was heard, and an old dog ran up to us; it was my predecessor's dog. Its eye was dim, its coat was gray, and it exhibited every symptom of the greatest age a dog can reach. I patted it gently with my hand, and it immediately walked beside me with an air of inexpressible satisfaction. An old woman, who had been housekeeper to the former priest, also came to meet us, and after having shown us into the lower room, asked me if I intended to keep her. I told her that I should do so, and the dog and the hens also, and whatever furniture her master had left her at his death, which caused her a transport of joy, Father Serapion having at once paid her the price she had set upon it.

Having thus installed me, Father Serapion returned

to the seminary. I therefore remained alone and without any other help than my own. The thought of Clarimonda again began to haunt me, and in spite of the efforts I made to drive it away, I was not always successful. One evening as I was walking through the box-edged walks of my little garden, I thought I saw through the shrubbery a female form watching my movements, and two sea-green eyes flashing amid the foliage, but it was merely an illusion. Having passed on the other side of the walk, I found only the imprint of a foot on the sand, so small that it looked like a child's foot. The garden was shut in by very high walls. I visited every nook and corner of it, but found no one. I have never been able to explain the fact, which, for the matter of that, was nothing by comparison with the strange things that were to happen to me.

I had been living in this way for a year, carefully fulfilling all the duties of my profession, praying, fasting, exhorting, and succouring the sick, giving alms even to the extent of depriving myself of the most indispensable necessaries; but I felt within me extreme aridity, and the sources of grace were closed to me. I did not enjoy the happiness which comes of fulfilling

a holy mission; my thoughts were elsewhere, and Clarimonda's words often recurred to me. O my brother, ponder this carefully. Because I had a single time looked at a woman, because I had committed a fault apparently so slight, I suffered for several years the most dreadful agitation and my life was troubled forever.

I shall not dwell longer upon these inward defeats and victories which were always followed by greater falls, but I shall pass at once to a decisive circumstance. One night there was a violent ringing at my door. The housekeeper went to open it, and a dark-complexioned man, richly dressed in a foreign fashion, wearing a long dagger, showed under the rays of Barbara's lantern. Her first movement was one of terror, but the man reassured her, and told her that he must see me at once on a matter concerning my ministry. Barbara brought him upstairs. I was just about to go to bed. The man told me that his mistress, a very great lady, was dying and asking for a priest. I replied that I was ready to follow him, took what was needed for extreme unction, and descended quickly. At the door were impatiently pawing and stamping two horses black as night, breathing out long jets of smoke.

He held the stirrup for me and helped me to mount one, then sprang on the other, merely resting his hand upon the pommel of the saddle. He pressed in his knees and gave his horse its head, when it went off like an arrow. My own, of which he held the bridle, also started at a gallop and kept up easily with the other. We rushed over the ground, which flashed by us gray and streaked, and the black silhouettes of the trees fled like the rout of an army. We traversed a forest, the darkness of which was so dense and icy that I felt a shudder of superstitious terror. The sparks which our horses' hoofs struck from the stones formed a trail of fire, and if any one had seen us at that time of night, he would have taken us for two spectres bestriding nightmares. From time to time will-o'-the-wisps flashed across the road, and the jackdaws croaked sadly in the thickness of the wood, in which shone here and there the phosphorescent eyes of wildcats. Our horses' manes streamed out wildly, sweat poured down their sides, and their breath came short and quick through their nostrils; but when the equerry saw them slackening speed, he excited them by a guttural cry which had nothing of human in it, and the race began again madder than ever. At

last our whirlwind stopped. A black mass dotted with brilliant points suddenly rose before us. The steps of our steeds sounded louder upon the iron-bound flooring, and we entered under an archway the sombre mouth of which yawned between two huge towers. Great excitement reigned in the château. Servants with torches in their hands were traversing the courts in every direction, and lights were ascending and descending from story to story. I caught a confused glimpse of vast architecture, — columns, arcades, steps, stairs, a perfectly regal and fairy-like splendour of construction. A negro page, the same who had handed me Clarimonda's tablets, and whom I at once recognised, helped me to descend, and a majordomo, dressed in black velvet, with a gold chain around his neck and an ivory cane, advanced towards me. Great tears fell from his eyes and flowed down his cheeks upon his white beard. "Too late," he said, shaking his head. "Too late, my lord priest. But if you have not been able to save the soul, come and pray for the poor body." He took me by the arm and led me to the room of death. I wept as bitterly as he did, for I had understood that the dead woman was none else than Clarimonda, whom I had loved so deeply and

madly. A prie-dieu was placed by the bedside; a bluish flame rising from a bronze cup cast through the room a faint, vague light, and here and there brought out of the shadow the corner of a piece of furniture or of a cornice. On a table, in a chased urn, was a faded white rose, the petals of which, with a single exception, had all fallen at the foot of the vase like perfumed tears. A broken black mask, a fan, and disguises of all kinds lay about on the armchairs, showing that death had entered this sumptuous dwelling unexpectedly and without warning. I knelt, not daring to cast my eyes on the bed, and began to recite the psalms with great fervour, thanking God for having put the tomb between the thought of that woman and myself, so that I might add to my prayers her name, henceforth sanctified. Little by little, however, my fervour diminished, and I fell into a reverie. The room had in no wise the aspect of a chamber of death. Instead of the fetid and cadaverous air which I was accustomed to breathe during my funeral watches, a languorous vapour of Oriental incense, a strange, amorous odour of woman, floated softly in the warm air. The pale light resembled less the yellow flame of the night-light that flickers by the side of the dead than

the soft illumination of voluptuousness. I thought of the strange chance which made me meet Clarimonda at the very moment when I had lost her forever, and a sigh of regret escaped from my breast. I thought I heard some one sigh behind me, and I turned involuntarily. It was the echo. As I turned, my eyes fell upon the state-bed which until then I had avoided looking at. The red damask curtains with great flowered pattern, held back by golden cords, allowed the dead woman to be seen, lying full length, her hands crossed on her breast. She was covered with a linen veil of dazzling whiteness, made still more brilliant by the dark purple of the hangings; it was so tenuous that it concealed nothing of the charming form of her body, and allowed me to note the lovely lines, undulating like the neck of a swan, which even death itself had been unable to stiffen. She looked like an alabaster statue, the work of some clever sculptor, intended to be placed on a queen's tomb, or a young sleeping girl on whom snow had fallen.

I was losing my self-mastery. The sensuous air intoxicated me, the feverish scent of the half-faded rose went to my brain, and I strode up and down the room, stopping every time before the dais to gaze at

the lovely dead woman through her transparent shroud. Strange thoughts came into my mind; I imagined that she was not really dead, that this was but a feint she had employed to draw me to her château and to tell me of her love. Once indeed I thought I saw her foot move under the white veil, disarranging the straight folds of the shroud.

Then I said to myself, "But is it Clarimonda? How do I know? The black page may have passed into some other woman's service. I am mad to grieve and worry as I am doing." But my heart replied, as it beat loud, "It is she, — it is none but she." I drew nearer the bed and gazed with increased attention at the object of my uncertainty. Shall I confess it? The perfection of her form, though refined and sanctified by the shadow of death, troubled me more voluptuously than was right, and her repose was so like sleep that any one might have been deceived by it. I forgot that I had come there to perform the funeral offices, and I imagined that I was a young husband entering the room of his bride who hides her face through modesty and will not allow herself to be seen. Sunk in grief, mad with joy, shivering with fear and pleasure, I bent towards her and took up the corner

of the shroud; I raised it slowly, holding in my breath for fear of waking her. My arteries palpitated with such force that I felt the blood surging in my temples and my brow was covered with sweat as if I had been lifting a marble slab. It was indeed Clarimonda, such as I had seen her in the church on the day of my ordination. She was as lovely as then, and death seemed to be but a new coquetry of hers. The pallor of her cheeks, the paler rose of her lips, the long closed eyelashes showing their brown fringes against the whiteness, gave her an inexpressibly seductive expression of melancholy chastity and of pensive suffering. Her long hair, undone, in which were still a few little blue flowers, formed a pillow for her head and protected with its curls the nudity of her shoulders. Her lovely hands, purer and more diaphanous than the Host, were crossed in an attitude of pious repose and of silent prayer that softened the too great seduction, even in death, of the exquisite roundness and the ivory polish of her bare arms from which the pearl bracelets had not been removed. I remained long absorbed in mute contemplation. The longer I looked at her, the less I could believe that life had forever forsaken that lovely frame. I know not whether it was an illusion

or a reflection of the lamp, but it seemed to me that the blood was beginning to course again under the mat pallor; yet she still remained perfectly motionless. I gently touched her arm; it was cold, yet no colder than her hand on the day it touched me under the porch of the church. I resumed my position, bending my face over hers, and let fall upon her cheeks the warm dew of my tears. Oh, what a bitter despair and powerlessness I felt! Oh, what agony I underwent during that watch! I wished I could take my whole life in order to give it to her, and breathe upon her icy remains the flame that devoured me. Night was passing, and feeling the moment of eternal separation approaching, I was unable to refuse myself the sad and supreme sweetness of putting one kiss upon the dead lips of her who had had all my love. But, oh, wonder! a faint breath mingled with mine, and Clarimonda's lips answered to the pressure of mine. Her eyes opened, became somewhat brighter, she sighed, and moving her arms, placed them around my neck with an air of ineffable delight. "Oh, it is you, Romualdo!" she said in a voice as languishing and soft as the last faint vibrations of a harp. "I waited for you so long that I am dead. But now we are be-

trothed; I shall be able to see you and to come to you. Farewell, Romualdo, farewell! I love you; that is all I wish to say to you, and I give you back the life which you have recalled to me for one moment with your kiss. Good-bye, but not for long."

Her head fell back, but her arms were still around me as if to hold me. A wild gust of wind burst in the window and rushed into the room; the last leaf of the white rose fluttered for a moment like a wing at the top of the stem, then broke away and flew out of the casement, bearing Clarimonda's soul. The lamp went out and I swooned away on the bosom of the lovely dead.

When I recovered my senses, I was lying on my bed in my little room in my house, and the old dog of the former priest was licking my hand that was hanging out from under the blanket. Barbara, shaky with old age, was busy opening and closing drawers and mixing powders in glasses. On seeing me open my eyes, the old woman uttered a cry of joy, while the dog yelped and wagged his tail; but I was so weak that I could neither move nor speak. I learned later that I had remained for three days in that condition, giving no other sign of life than faint breathing. These

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three days are cut out of my life. I do not know where my mind was during that time, having absolutely no remembrance of it. Barbara told me that the same copper-complexioned man who had come to fetch me during the night, had brought me back the next morning in a closed litter and had immediately departed. As soon as I could collect my thoughts, I went over in my own mind all the circumstances of that fatal night. At first I thought I had been the dupe of some magical illusion, but real and palpable circumstances soon shattered that supposition. I could not believe I had been dreaming, since Barbara had seen, just as I had, the man with two black horses, and described his dress and appearance accurately. Yet no one knew of any château in the neighbourhood answering to the description of that in which I had again met Clarimonda.

One morning I saw Father Serapion enter. Barbara had sent him word that I was ill, and he had hastened to come to me. Although this eagerness proved affection for and interest in me, his visit did not give me the pleasure I should have felt. The penetration and the inquisitiveness of his glance troubled me; I felt embarrassed and guilty in his presence. He had been

the first to notice my inward trouble, and I was annoyed by his clear-sightedness. While asking news of my health in a hypocritically honeyed tone he fixed upon me his two yellow, lion-like eyes, and plunged his glance into my soul like a sounding-rod. Then he asked me a few questions as to the way in which I was working my parish, if I enjoyed my position, how I spent the time which my duties left me, if I had made any acquaintances among the inhabitants of the place, what was my favourite reading, and many other details of the same kind. I answered as briefly as possible, and he himself, without waiting for me to finish, passed on to something else. The conversation evidently had nothing to do with what he meant to say to me. Then, without any preparation, as if it were a piece of news which he had just recollected and which he was afraid to again forget, he said, in a clear, vibrant voice that sounded in my ear like the trump of the Last Judgment: —

"The great courtesan Clarimonda died recently, after an orgy that lasted eight days and nights. It was infernally splendid. They renewed the abominations of the feasts of Belshazzar and Cleopatra. What an age we are living in! The guests were served

by dark slaves speaking an unknown language, who, I think, must have been fiends; the livery of the meanest of them might have served for the gala dress of an emperor. There have always been very strange stories about this Clarimonda; all her lovers have died a wretched and violent death. It is said that she was a ghoul, a female vampire, but I am of opinion that she was Beelzebub in person."

He was silent and watched me more attentively than ever to see the effect his words produced upon me. I had been unable to repress a start on hearing the name of Clarimonda, and the news of her death, besides the grief it caused me, through the strange coincidence with the nocturnal scene of which I had been a witness, filled me with a trouble and terror that showed in my face in spite of the efforts I made to master myself. Serapion looked at me anxiously and severely; then he said: "My son, I am bound to warn you that you have one foot over the abyss. Beware lest you fall in. Satan has a long arm, and tombs are not always faithful. The stone over Clarimonda should be sealed with a triple seal, for it is not, I am told, the first time that she has died. May God watch over you, Romualdo!"

With these words he walked slowly towards the door, and I did not see him again, for he left for S—— almost immediately.

I had at last entirely recovered, and had resumed my usual duties. The remembrance of Clarimonda and the words of the old priest were ever present to my mind; yet no extraordinary event had confirmed Serapion's gloomy predictions. I therefore began to believe that his fears and my terrors were exaggerated; but one night I dreamed a dream. I had scarcely fallen asleep when I heard the curtains of my bed open and the rings sliding over the bars with a rattling sound. I sat up abruptly, leaning on my elbow, and saw the shadow of a woman standing before me. I at once recognised Clarimonda. In her hand she bore a small lamp, of the shape of those put into tombs, the light of which gave to her slender fingers a rosy transparency that melted by insensible gradations into the opaque milky whiteness of her bare arm. Her sole vestment was the linen shroud that had covered her upon her state bed, and the folds of which she drew over her bosom as if she were ashamed of being so little clothed, but her small hand could not manage it. It was so white that the colour of the drapery was

confounded with that of the flesh under the pale light of the lamp. Enveloped in the delicate tissue which revealed all the contours of her body, she resembled an antique marble statue of a bather rather than a woman filled with life. Dead or living, statue or woman, shadow or body, her beauty was still the same; only the green gleam of her eyes was somewhat dulled, and her mouth, so purple of yore, had now only a pale, tender rose-tint almost like that of her cheeks. The little blue flowers which I had noticed in her hair were dried up and had lost most of their leaves. And yet she was charming, so charming that in spite of the strangeness of the adventure and the inexplicable manner in which she had entered the room, I did not experience a single thrill of terror.

She placed the lamp on the table and sat down on the foot of my bed. Then bending towards me, she said in the silvery, velvety voice which I had heard from no one but her: —

"I have made you wait a long time, dear Romualdo, and you must have thought I had forgotten you. But I have come from a very long distance, from a bourne whence no traveller has yet returned. There is neither moon nor sun in the country whence I have come;

neither road nor path; naught but space and shadow; no ground for the foot, no air for the wing; and yet I am here, for love is stronger than death and overcomes it. Ah, what worn faces, what terrible things I have seen on my way! What difficulty my soul, which returned to this world by the power of will, experienced before it could find its own body and re-enter it! What efforts I had to make before I could push up the tombstone with which they had covered me! See! the palms of my poor hands are all bruised. Kiss them and cure them, my dear love." And one after the other, she put the cold palms of her hands upon my lips. I did kiss them many a time, and she watched me with a smile of ineffable satisfaction.

I confess it to my shame, — I had wholly forgotten the counsels of Father Serapion and my own profession; I had fallen without resisting and at the first blow; I had not even endeavoured to drive away the tempter. The freshness of Clarimonda's skin penetrated mine, and I felt voluptuous thrills running through my body. Poor child! In spite of all that I have seen of her, I find it difficult to believe that she was a demon; she certainly did not look like one, and never did Satan better conceal his claws and horns.

She had pulled her feet up under her, and was curled up on the edge of my bed in an attitude full of nonchalant coquetry. From time to time she passed her little hand through my hair and rolled it into ringlets as if to try how different ways of dressing it would suit my face. I allowed her to go on with the most guilty complaisance, and while she toyed with me she chatted brightly. The remarkable thing is that I experienced no astonishment at so extraordinary an adventure, and with the facility we enjoy in dreams of admitting as quite simple the most amazing events, it seemed to me that everything that was happening was quite natural.

"I loved you long before I had seen you, dear Romualdo, and I had looked for you everywhere. You were my dream, and when I saw you in church at that fatal moment, I at once said, 'It is he!' I cast on you a glance in which I put all the love which I had had, which I had, and which I was to have for you; a glance that would have damned a cardinal and made a king kneel before my feet in the presence of his whole court. But you remained impassible; you preferred your God to me. Oh, I am jealous of God, whom you loved, and whom you still love more

than me! Unfortunate that I am, — oh, most unfortunate! Your heart will never be wholly mine, though you brought me back to life with a kiss, though I am Clarimonda, who was dead and who for your sake burst the cerements of the tomb, and has come to devote to you a life which she has resumed only to make you happy!"

With these words she mingled intoxicating caresses which penetrated my senses and my reason to such a degree that I did not hesitate, in order to console her, to utter frightful blasphemies and to tell her that I loved her as much as I did God.

Her eyes brightened and shone like chrysoprase. "True? Quite true? as much as God?" she said, clasping me in her lovely arms. "Since that is so, you will go with me, you will follow me where I will. You shall cast off your ugly black clothes, you shall be the proudest and most envied of men, you shall be my lover. Oh, the lovely, happy life we shall lead! When shall we start?"

"To-morrow! to-morrow!" I cried in my delirium.

"To-morrow be it," she replied. "I shall have time to change my dress, for this one is rather scanty and not of much use for travelling. Then I must

also warn my people, who think me really dead, and who are mourning as hard as they can. Money, clothes, and carriage, — everything shall be ready, and I shall call for you at this same hour. Good-bye, dear heart," and she touched my brow with her lips.

The lamp went out, the windows were closed, and I saw no more. A leaden, dreamless sleep, overcame me and held me fast until the next morning. I awoke later than usual, and the remembrance of the strange vision agitated me the livelong day. At last I managed to persuade myself that it was a mere fever of my heated brain. Yet the sensation had been so intense that it was difficult to believe it was not real, and it was not without some apprehension of what might happen that I went to bed, after having prayed God to drive away from me evil thoughts and to protect the chastity of my sleep.

I soon fell fast asleep and my dream continued. The curtains were opened, and I saw Clarimonda, not as the first time, wan in her pale shroud, and the violets of death upon her cheeks, but gay, bright, and dainty, in a splendid travelling-dress of green velvet with gold braid, caught up on the side and showing a satin under-skirt. Her fair hair escaped in great curls

from below her broad black felt hat with capriciously twisted white feathers. She held in her hand a small riding-whip ending in a golden whistle. She touched me lightly with it and said: "Well, handsome sleeper, is that the way you get ready? I expected to find you up. Rise quickly, we have no time to lose."

I sprang from my bed.

"Come, put on your clothes and let us go," she said, pointing to a small parcel which she had brought. "The horses are impatiently champing their bits at the door. We ought to be thirty miles away by now."

I dressed hastily, and she herself passed me the clothes, laughing at my awkwardness and telling me what they were when I made a mistake. She arranged my hair for me, and when it was done, she held out a small pocket-mirror of Venice crystal framed with silver filigree and said to me, "What do you think of yourself? Will you take me as your valet?"

I was no longer the same man and did not recognise myself. I was no more like myself than a finished statue is like a block of stone. My former face seemed to me but a coarse sketch of the one reflected in the mirror. I was handsome, and my vanity was sensibly tickled by the metamorphosis. The elegant

clothes, the rich embroidered jacket, made me quite a different person, and I admired the power of transformation possessed by a few yards of stuff cut in a certain way. The spirit of my costume entered into me, and in ten minutes I was passably conceited. I walked up and down the room a few times to feel more at my ease in my new garments. Clarimonda looked at me with an air of maternal complaisance and appeared well satisfied with her work.

"Now, that is childishness enough. Let us be off, dear Romualdo; we are going a long way and we shall never get there." As she touched the doors they opened, and we passed by the dog without waking it.

At the door we found Margheritone, the equerry who had already conducted me. Hé held three horses, black like the first, one for me, one for himself, and one for Clarimonda. The horses must have been Spanish jennets, sired by the gale, for they went as fast as the wind, and the moon, which had risen to light us at our departure, rolled in the heavens like a wheel detached from its car. We saw it on our right spring from tree to tree, breathlessly trying to keep up with us. We soon reached a plain where by a clump of trees waited a carriage drawn by four horses. We got into it and

the horses started off at a mad gallop. I had one arm around Clarimonda's waist and one of her hands in mine; she leaned her head on my shoulder, and I felt her half-bare bosom against my arm. I had never enjoyed such lively happiness. I forgot everything at that moment. I no more remembered having been a priest, so great was the fascination which the evil spirit exercised over me. From that night my nature became in some sort double. There were in me two men unknown to each other. Sometimes I fancied myself a priest who dreamed every night he was a nobleman; sometimes I fancied I was a nobleman who dreamed he was a priest. I was unable to distinguish between the vision and the waking, and I knew not where reality began and illusion ended. The conceited libertine rallied the priest; the priest hated the excesses of the young nobleman. Two spirals, twisted one within the other and confounded without ever touching, very aptly represent this bicephalous life of mine. Yet, in spite of the strangeness of this position, I do not think that for one instant I was mad. I always preserved very clearly the perception of my double life. Only there was an absurd fact which I could not explain: it was

that the feeling of the same self should exist in two men so utterly different. That was an anomaly which I did not understand, whether I believed myself to be the parish priest of the little village of —— or il Signor Romualdo, the declared lover of Clarimonda.

What is certain is that I was, or at least believed that I was, in Venice. I have never yet been able to make out what was true and what was imaginary in that strange adventure. We dwelt in a great marble palace on the Canaleio, full of frescoes and statues, with two paintings in Titian's best manner in Clarimonda's bedroom. It was a palace worthy of a king. Each of us had his own gondola and gondoliers, his own livery, music-room, and poet. Clarimonda liked to live in great style, and she had something of Cleopatra in her nature. As for me, I lived like a prince's son, and acted as if I belonged to the family of the twelve Apostles or the four Evangelists of the Most Serene Republic; I would not have got out of my way to let the Doge pass, and I do not think that since Satan fell from heaven there was any one so proud and so insolent as I. I used to go to the Ridotto and gamble fearfully. I met the best society in the world, ruined eldest sons, swindlers, parasites, and swashbucklers;

yet in spite of this dissipated life, I remained faithful to Clarimonda. I loved her madly. She would have awakened satiety itself and fixed inconstancy. I should have been perfectly happy but for the accursed nightmare which returned every night, and in which I thought myself a parish priest living an ascetic life and doing penance for his excesses of the daytime. Reassured by the habit of being with her, I scarcely ever thought of the strange manner in which I had made her acquaintance. However, what Father Serapion had told me about her occasionally occurred to my mind and caused me some uneasiness.

For some time past Clarimonda's health had been failing. Her complexion was becoming paler and paler every day. The doctors, when called in, failed to understand her disease and knew not how to treat it. They prescribed insignificant remedies, and did not return. Meanwhile she became plainly paler, and colder and colder. She was almost as white and as dead as on that famous night in the unknown château. I was bitterly grieved to see her thus slowly pining away. She, touched by my sorrow, smiled gently and sadly at me with the smile of one who knows she is dying.

One morning I was seated by her bed breakfasting at a small table, in order not to leave her a minute. As I pared a fruit I happened to cut my finger rather deeply. The blood immediately flowed in a purple stream, and a few drops fell upon Clarimonda. Her eyes lighted up, her face assumed an expression of fierce and savage joy which I had never before beheld. She sprang from her bed with the agility of an animal, of a monkey or of a cat, and sprang at my wound, which she began to suck with an air of inexpressible delight. She sipped the blood slowly and carefully like a gourmand who enjoys a glass of sherry or Syracuse wine; she winked her eyes, the green pupils of which had become oblong instead of round. From time to time she broke off to kiss my hand, then she again pressed the wound with her lips so as to draw out a few more red drops. When she saw that the blood had ceased to flow, she rose up, rosier than a May morn, her face full, her eyes moist and shining, her hand soft and warm; in a word, more beautiful than ever and in a perfect state of health.

"I shall not die! I shall not die!" she said, half mad with joy, as she hung around my neck. "I shall be able to love you a long time yet. My life is in

yours, and all that I am comes from you. A few drops of your rich, noble blood, more precious and more efficacious than all the elixirs in the world, have restored my life."

The scene preoccupied me a long time and filled me with strange doubts concerning Clarimonda. That very evening, when sleep took me back to the presbytery, I saw Father Serapion, graver and more care-worn than ever. He looked at me attentively, and said to me: "Not satisfied with losing your soul, you want to lose your body also. Unfortunate youth, what a trap you have fallen into!" The tone in which he said these few words struck me greatly, but in spite of its vivacity, the impression was soon dispelled and numerous other thoughts effaced it from my mind. However, one evening I saw in my mirror, the perfidious position of which she had not taken into account, Clarimonda pouring a powder into the cup of spiced wine she was accustomed to prepare for me after the meal. I took the cup, feigned to carry it to my lips, and put it away as if to finish it later at leisure, but I profited by a moment when my beauty had turned her back, to throw the contents under the table, after which I withdrew to my room and went to

bed, thoroughly determined not to sleep, and to see what she would do. I had not long to wait. Clarimonda entered in her night-dress, and having thrown it off, stretched herself in the bed by me. When she was quite certain that I was asleep, she bared my arm, drew a golden pin from her hair, and whispered, "One drop, nothing but a little red drop, a ruby at the end of my needle! Since you still love me, I must not die. Oh, my dear love! I shall drink your beautiful, brilliant, purple blood. Sleep, my sole treasure, my god and my child. I shall not hurt you, I shall only take as much of your life as I need not to lose my own. If I did not love you so much, I might make up my mind to have other lovers whose veins I would drain; but since I have known you, I have a horror of every one else. Oh, what a lovely arm! how round and white it is! I shall never dare to prick that pretty blue vein." And as she spoke, she wept, and I felt her tears upon my arm which she held in her hands. At last she made up her mind, pricked me with the needle, and began to suck the blood that flowed. Though she had scarcely imbibed a few drops, she feared to exhaust me. She tied my arm with a narrow band, after having rubbed

my wound with an unguent which healed it immediately.

I could no longer doubt; Father Serapion was right. However, in spite of the certainty, I could not help loving Clarimonda, and I would willingly have given her all the blood she needed in order to support her factitious existence. Besides, I was not much afraid, for the woman guarded me against the vampire; what I had heard and seen completely reassured me. At that time I had full-blooded veins which would not be very speedily exhausted, and I did not care whether my life went drop by drop. I would have opened my arm myself and said to her, "Drink, and let my life enter your body with my blood." I avoided alluding in the least to the narcotic which she had poured out for me and the scene of the pin, and we lived in the most perfect harmony.

Yet my priestly scruples tormented me more than ever, and I knew not what new penance to invent to tame and mortify my flesh. Although all these visions were involuntary and I in no wise took part in them, I dared not touch the crucifix with hands so impure and a mind so soiled by such debauch, whether real or imaginary. After falling into these fatiguing hallucina-

tions, I tried to keep from sleeping. I kept my eyes open with my fingers, and remained standing by the wall struggling against slumber with all my strength; but soon it would force itself into my eyes, and seeing that the struggle was useless, I let fall my arms with discouragement and weariness, while the current carried me again to the perfidious shores. Serapion exhorted me most vehemently, and harshly reproached me with weakness and lack of fervour. One day, when he had been more agitated than usual, he said to me: —

"There is but one way of ridding you of this obsession, and although it is extreme, we must make use of it. Great evils require great remedies. I know where Clarimonda is buried. We must dig her up, and you shall see in what a pitiful condition is the object of your love. You will no longer be tempted to lose your soul for a loathsome body devoured by worms and about to fall into dust. It will assuredly bring you back to your senses."

For myself, I was so wearied of my double life that I accepted, wishing to know once for all whether it was the priest or the nobleman who was the dupe of an illusion. I was determined to kill, for the benefit of the one or the other, one of the two men who were

in me, or to kill them both, for such a life as I had been leading was unendurable. Father Serapion provided a pick, a crowbar, and a lantern, and at midnight we repaired to the cemetery of ——, the place of which he knew accurately, as well as the disposition of the graves. Having cast the light of our lantern upon the inscriptions on several tombs, we at last reached a stone half hidden by tall grass and covered with moss and parasitical plants, on which we made out this partial inscription: "Here lies Clarimonda, who in her lifetime was the most beautiful woman in the world. . . ."

"This is the spot," said Serapion, and putting down the lantern, he introduced the crowbar in the joints of the stone and began to raise it. The stone yielded, and he set to work with the pick. I watched him, darker and more silent than the night itself. As for him, bending over this funereal work, he perspired heavily and his quick breath sounded like the rattle in a dying man's throat. It was a strange spectacle, and any one who might have seen us would have taken us rather for men profaning the tomb and robbing the shrouds than for priests of God. Serapion's zeal had something harsh and savage which made him resemble

a demon rather than an apostle or an angel, and his face, with its austere features sharply brought out by the light of the lantern, was in no wise reassuring. I felt an icy sweat break out on my limbs, my hair rose upon my head. Within myself I considered the action of the severe Serapion an abominable sacrilege, and I wished that from the sombre clouds that passed heavily over our heads might flash a bolt that would reduce him to powder. The owls, perched on the cypresses, troubled by the light of the lantern, struck the glass with their dusty wings and uttered plaintive cries. The foxes yelped in the distance, and innumerable sinister noises rose in the silence.

At last Serapion's pick struck the coffin, which gave out the dull, sonorous sound which nothingness gives out when it is touched. He pulled off the cover, and I saw Clarimonda, pale as marble, her hands clasped, her white shroud forming but one line from her head to her feet. A little red drop shone like a rose at the corner of her discoloured lips. Serapion at the sight of it became furious.

"Ah! there you are, you demon, you shameless courtesan! You who drink blood and gold!" and he cast on the body and the coffin quantities of holy water,

tracing with the sprinkler a cross upon the coffin. The holy dew no sooner touched poor Clarimonda than her lovely body fell into dust and became only a hideous mass of ashes and half-calcined bones. "There is your mistress, my lord Romualdo," said the inexorable priest, as he pointed to the remains. "Are you now still tempted to go to the Lido and Fusino with your beauty?"

I bowed my head. Something had been shattered within me. I returned to my presbytery, and lord Romualdo, the lover of Clarimonda, left the poor priest with whom he had so long kept such strange company. Only the next night I saw Clarimonda. She said to me, as the first time under the porch of the church, "Unfortunate man! unfortunate man! What have you done? Why did you listen to that foolish priest? Were you not happy? What have I done to you, that you should go and violate my poor tomb and lay bare the wretchedness of my nothingness? All communion between our souls and bodies is henceforth broken. Farewell; you will regret me."

She vanished in air like a vapour, and I never saw her again. Alas! she spoke the truth. I have regretted her more than once, and I still regret her. I

purchased the peace of my soul very dearly. The love of God was not too much to replace her love.

Such, brother, is the story of my youth. Never look upon a woman, and walk always with your eyes cast on the ground, for chaste and calm though you may be, a single minute may make you lose eternity.

Arria Marcella

ARRIA MARCELLA

A SOUVENIR OF POMPEII

THREE young fellows, three friends who had gone to Italy together, were last year visiting the Studj Museum at Naples, where have been collected various antiquities from the excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum.

They wandered through the rooms as their fancy led them, and examined the mosaics, bronzes, and frescoes detached from the walls of the dead city. When one of them came upon something interesting, he would call to his companions with a joyous shout, to the great disgust of the taciturn English and the stolid tourists busy turning over their guide-books.

The youngest of the trio, who had stopped by a glass case, appeared not to hear the exclamations of the others, for he was absorbed in deep contemplation. He was examining most attentively a heap of black coagulated ashes, with a hollow imprint. It looked like a fragment of a statue mould, broken in the casting. An artist's practised eye would have easily

recognised in it the outline of a beautiful bosom, and of a hip as pure in style as that of a Greek statue. Every one knows, for every guide-book mentions the fact, that this lava ash, which cooled round a woman's body, preserved the exquisite contours of her frame. Thanks to the caprice of the eruption which destroyed four cities, this noble form, that turned to dust some two thousand years ago, has come down to us. The rounded bosom has traversed the ages; while on the other hand, many vanished empires have left no trace behind them. This mark of beauty, stamped by chance upon the scoriæ of a volcano, has not been effaced.

Seeing that he could not drag himself away, Octavian's two friends returned to him, and Max, touching him on the shoulder, made him start like a man whose secret has been surprised. Plainly Octavian had not heard Max and Fabio approach.

"Come, Octavian," said Max, "don't stop for hours at a time by each case, or we shall miss the train, and be unable to see Pompeii to-day."

"What is our friend looking at?" added Fabio, who had drawn near. "Ah, I see! The imprint found in the house of Arrius Diomedes."

He cast a quick, strange look at Octavian, who blushed slightly as he took Max's arm, and the visit ended without further incident.

On leaving the Museum, the three friends got into a corricolo, and were driven to the station. The corricolo, with its great red wheels, its seat studded with brass nails, its thin and spirited horse, harnessed like a Spanish mule, galloping along the broad lava flags, is too well known to need describing here. Besides, I am not writing impressions of travel in Naples, but the simple account of a strange and rather incredible adventure, which is nevertheless true.

The railway to Pompeii runs almost the whole way along the seashore. The waves break in foam upon a black sand that looks like sifted charcoal, for the beach is formed of molten lava and volcanic ashes. Its dark tone contrasts with the blue of the sky and the blue of the water. The earth alone seems to be in shadow in the midst of all that splendour.

The villages which the railway traverses, or skirts — Portici, made famous by Auber's opera, Resina, Torre del Greco, Torre dell' Annunziata, the arcaded houses and terraced roofs of which are seen on the way — have, in spite of the intensity of the sunshine and

the southern whitewash, a Plutonian and ferruginous character, like Manchester and Birmingham. The dust is black; impalpable soot clings to everything; one feels that the great forge of Vesuvius is puffing and smoking close by.

The three friends alighted at the Pompeii Station, amused by the mixture of antiquity and modern times naturally suggested to the mind by the title "Pompeii Station;" a Greco-Roman city, and a railway terminus!

They traversed the cotton field — over which fluttered some white flakes — which lies between the railway and the unburied city, and took a guide at the osteria built outside the old ramparts — or, more correctly speaking, a guide took them, a calamity which it is difficult to avoid in Italy.

It was one of those lovely days so frequent in Naples, when, owing to the brilliancy of the sunshine and the purity of the air, objects assume a colouring which appears fabulous in the North, and seem to belong rather to a dream world than to reality. Who ever has once seen that light of mingled gold and azure remains homesick for it when back amid his native fogs.

The innumerable details of the unburied city, which had thrown off a corner of its ashen shroud, stood out

in the blinding light. In the background showed the cone of Vesuvius, rayed with blue, rose, and violet lava, gilded by the sun. A faint mist, almost invisible in the light, capped the mountain's broken crest. At the first glance it might have been mistaken for one of those cloudlets that often on the clearest day rest on the summit of high peaks, but when observed more closely, it was seen to contain slender whisps of white vapour, issuing from the upper part of the mount as from the holes of a perfume-burner, to meet in the form of a light vapour. The volcano, good-tempered that day, was quietly smoking its pipe, and but for the fact that Pompeii lay buried at its feet, it might well have been supposed as gentle-tempered as Montmartre. On the other side lovely hills, with undulating and voluptuous lines, like those of a woman's hips, bounded the horizon; and still farther away, the calm azure line of the sea, that formerly brought biremes and triremes up to the ramparts of the city.

Surprising indeed is the aspect of Pompeii. Even the most prosaic and least intelligent natures are amazed by the sudden retrogression of nineteen centuries. In two steps one passes from modern to antique life, from Christianity to Paganism. When

the three friends saw the streets in which the forms of a vanished existence have been preserved intact, though they were prepared by the books they had read and the drawings they had seen, they experienced a deep and strange impression. Octavian in particular seemed stupefied, and mechanically followed the guide like a somnambulist, without listening to the monotonous nomenclature, committed to memory, which the fellow was reciting like a lesson.

He looked with amazed glance at the ruts worn in the cyclopean pavements of the streets, seemingly no older than yesterday, so sharp are the lines; the inscriptions, written in red letters with a free hand upon the walls, the playbills, notices of houses to let, votive formulæ, signs, advertisements of all kinds, as interesting as, two thousand years hence, will be to the yet unknown nations of the future a wall of Paris found with all its notices and posters. The houses with their broken-in roofs, that allowed the glance to penetrate the mysteries of the interior, the many domestic details which historians neglect, and the secret of which civilisations carry away with them, the scarce dry fountains, the Forum, caught by the catastrophe while being repaired, the clean outlines of the columns and archi-

traves cut and carved, waiting to be put in their proper places; the temples, consecrated to gods now become mythological, but which then had not a single atheist; the shops, in which nothing was lacking but the shop-keeper; the taverns, where might yet be seen on the marble tops of the tables the circular stain left by the topers' cups; the barracks with the pillars painted yellow and red, on which the soldiers had drawn caricatures of combatants; and the two theatres, of the drama and of song, side by side, which might reopen their doors but that the troupes which played there, now reduced to dust, were, perhaps, stopping a bung-hole or a crack in a wall, like the noble dust of Alexander and Cæsar, as Hamlet in melancholy mood remarked.

Fabio ascended the stage of the Tragic Theatre, while Octavian and Max climbed to the top of the benches, and there he began to recite, with abundant pantomime, the passages of verse which occurred to him, to the great terror of the lizards, which fled with quivering tails and concealed themselves in the cracks of the ruinous courses of stone. Although the brass and earthen vessels intended to act as sounding-boards no longer existed, his voice nevertheless was heard sonorous and vibrant.

The guide next led them, through the cultivated ground which covers the yet buried portions of Pompeii, to the amphitheatre at the other extremity of the city. They walked under trees the roots of which plunged into the roofs of the buried houses, tearing away the tiles, cracking the ceilings, dislocating the pillars; they passed through fields in which vulgar vegetables ripened over marvels of art, material images of that forgetfulness which time casts over the finest things.

The amphitheatre did not impress them much. They had already seen that at Verona, which is larger and fully as well preserved; they were as well acquainted with the arrangement of these arenas of antiquity as with that of the bull-fight arenas in Spain, which resemble them closely, save that they are not as solidly constructed nor of as fine materials.

So they retraced their steps, reached by a cross way the Street of Fortune, listening indifferently to the guide, who, as he passed before each house, called it by the name bestowed upon it when it was discovered, and which was derived from some characteristic peculiarity: the House of the Bronze Bull, the House of the Faun, the House of the Ship, the Temple of Fortune, the House of Meleager, the Tavern of For-

tune at the corner of the Consular Street, the Academy of Music, the Public Bake-house, the Pharmacy, the Surgeon's Shop, the Custom House, the Vestals' Dwelling, the Inn of Albinus, the Thermopoli, and so on till they reached the gate leading to the Way of the Tombs.

Within the interior arch of this brick gate, covered with statues, and the ornaments of which have disappeared, there are two deep grooves intended for a portcullis, just as in a mediæval donjon, which might have been supposed to possess the monopoly of this particular kind of defence.

"Who would have suspected," said Max to his friends, "that Pompeii, the Greco-Latin city, possessed a gate so romantically Gothic? Can you imagine a belated Roman knight sounding his horn in front of this gate, like a page of the fifteenth century, in order to have the portcullis raised?"

"There's nothing new under the sun," answered Fabio, "and even that remark is not new, since Solomon made it."

"Perhaps there may be something new under the moon," put in Octavian, with a smile of melancholy irony.

"My dear Octavian," said Max, who had meanwhile stopped before an inscription traced in red on the outer wall, "would you like to be present at a combat of gladiators? Here are the advertisements: Battle and hunt on the fifth of the nones of April; the masts will be raised; twenty pairs of gladiators will fight on the nones; and if you should happen to fear for your complexion, you may be reassured, the awnings will be stretched, — unless you prefer coming to the amphitheatre early, for these fellows are to cut each other's throats in the morning — *matutini erunt*. Most kind indeed!"

As they chatted thus, the three friends walked down the Way, bordered by sepulchres, which to our modern feelings would be a sombre entrance to a city, but which had not the same meaning for the ancients, whose tombs, instead of a hideous body, contained merely a handful of ashes — the abstract idea of death. Art embellished these final dwellings, and as Goethe says, the Pagan decorated the sarcophagi and urns with the images of life.

That was indeed the reason why Max and Fabio were visiting, with bright curiosity and an enjoyment of life which they would certainly not have felt in a

Christian cemetery, these funereal monuments so richly gilded by the sun, and which, placed as they were on either side of the road, seemed still to belong to life, suggesting nothing of that cold repulsion or of that fantastic terror which is due to our lugubrious mode of burial. They stopped before the tomb of Mamia, the public priestess, near which has grown a tree, a cypress or a poplar. They sat down in the hemicycle of the triclinium of the funereal repasts, laughing as if they had just come into an inheritance. They cracked no end of jokes upon the epitaphs of Nævoleia, Labeon, and the Arria family, save Octavian, who seemed to feel more deeply than his careless companions the fate of the dead of two thousand years ago.

They thus came to the villa of Arrius Diomedes, one of the largest dwellings in Pompeii. It is reached by brick steps, and after passing through the door, flanked by two small columns, one enters a courtyard, like the *patio* in the centre of Spanish and Moorish houses, and to which the ancients gave the name of *impluvium* or *cavædium*. Fourteen brick columns covered with stucco formed on its four faces a portico, or covered peristyle, like a convent cloister, in which the inhabi-

tants could walk, sheltered from the rain. The court is paved with a mosaic of bricks and white marble, the effect of which is very soft and pleasant to the eye. In the centre, a still existing square marble basin received the rain water which fell from the roof of the portico. It produces a strange impression to penetrate thus into the life of antiquity, and to walk in patent-leather boots upon the marble pavement worn by the sandals and cothurns of the contemporaries of Augustus and Tiberius.

The guide then took them into the hexedra or summer drawing-room, opening towards the sea, for the sake of the cool breeze. This was the place where visitors were received and a siesta was indulged in during the hot hours of the day, when the mighty African zephyrs laden with languor and storms were blowing. He showed them into the basilica, a long open gallery lighting the apartments, in which visitors and clients waited until called by the usher. He next led them to the terrace of white marble, whence the view extends over the green gardens and the blue sea. Then he showed them the nymphæum, or bath-room, with walls painted yellow, stucco columns and mosaic pavement, and the marble bath which received so many

lovely bodies now vanished like shadows; the cubiculum, in which floated so many dreams that had entered through the ivory door; the alcoves in the wall, closed by a conopeum or curtain, the bronze rings of which are still lying on the ground; the tetrastyle or recreation-room; the chapel of the household gods, the cabinet of archives, the library, the museum of paintings, the gynæceum, or women's apartments, composed of small chambers partly in ruins, on the walls of which they observed some traces of paintings and arabesques, like cheeks from which the rouge has been unskilfully wiped.

Having finished this part of the visit, they went down to the lower story, for the ground is much lower on the garden side than on the side of the Street of Tombs. They traversed eight halls, painted in rosso antico, in one of which are niches like those in the vestibule of the Hall of Ambassadors in the Alhambra, and they at last reached a sort of cellar, the use of which was plainly indicated by eight clay amphoræ standing against the wall, and which had no doubt been perfumed like Horace's odes with Cretan, Falernian, and Massican wine. A bright beam of light entered through a narrow opening obstructed by nettles,

the leaves of which the light transformed into emeralds and topazes, this bright touch of nature smiling very seasonably upon the gloom of the place.

"This is the spot," said the guide in his drawling voice, the tone of which scarcely harmonized with the meaning of the words, "where was found, among seventeen skeletons, that of the lady the imprint of which is in the Naples Museum. She had on gold rings, and the remains of a fine tunic still adhered to the ash cast that had preserved her shape."

The guide's commonplace statements moved Octavian deeply. He desired to be shown the exact spot where the precious remains had been discovered, and had he not been restrained by the presence of his friends he would have indulged in some extravagant lyrical outburst. His breast heaved, his eyes were moist; the catastrophe effaced by twenty centuries of forgetfulness impressed him like a quite recent misfortune; the death of his mistress or of a friend would not have moved him more, and a tear, two thousand years late, fell, while Max's and Fabio's backs were turned, upon the spot where had perished, stifled by the hot ashes of the volcano, the woman for whom he felt himself filled with retrospective love.

"We have had enough archæology," cried Fabio; "for we do not propose to write a dissertation upon a pitcher or a tile of the days of Julius Cæsar, in order to be elected to some provincial academy. These classical remembrances make me hungry. Let us go and dine, if the thing is possible, at that picturesque osteria; though I am afraid they will serve us with fossil beef-steaks and fresh eggs laid before Pliny's death."

"I shall not quote Boileau, and say, 'A fool occasionally gives good advice,'" said Max laughing; "it would not be polite. Your idea is a good one, though it would have been pleasanter to have our meal here on a triclinium, lying down after the antique fashion, and waited on by slaves, after the manner of Lucullus and Trimalcion. It is true that I don't see many oysters from the Lucrine Lake; the turbots and mullets of the Adriatic are wanting; the Apulian boar is not to be found in the market; the loaves and honey-cakes are in the Naples Museum, hard as stones by the side of their verdigrised moulds; raw macaroni, dusted with caccia-cavallo, detestable though it is, is better than nothing. What is dear Octavian's opinion?"

Octavian, who greatly regretted not having been in Pompeii on the day of the eruption of Vesuvius, so

that he might have saved the lady with the gold rings and thus deserved her love, had not heard a single word of this gastronomical conversation. Only the last two words uttered by Max struck his ear, and as he had no desire to begin a discussion, he nodded affirmatively at a venture, and the three friends started back to the inn, following the line of the ramparts.

The table was set in a sort of open porch which forms a vestibule to the osteria, and the whitewashed walls of which were decorated with daubs claimed by the host to be the work of Salvator Rosa, Spagnoletto, Massimo, and other celebrated painters of the Neapolitan school, which he felt it to be his duty to praise.

"Venerable host," said Fabio, "do not waste your eloquence. We are not English, and we prefer girls to old paintings. Rather send us your wine list by that handsome brunette with velvet eyes whom I caught sight of on the stairs."

The palforio, perceiving that his guests did not belong to the easily taken-in class of Philistines and tradespeople, stopped praising his gallery in order to praise his cellar. To begin with, he had every wine of the best brands: Château-Margaux, Grand-Laffitte which had been to India and back, Moët, Sillery,

Hochmeyer, port and porter, ale and ginger beer, white and red Lacryma Christi, Capri and Falernian.

"What! You have Falernian, you wretch, and put it at the bottom of your list! You compel us to listen to a prosy œnological litany," said Max, springing to the inn-keeper's throat with a gesture of comic fury. "You are utterly lacking in feeling for local colour; you are unworthy of living in this antique neighbourhood. But, is your Falernian good? Was it put into amphoræ under the consulship of Plancus — *Consule Planco?*"

"I do not know who Consul Plancus is, and my wine is not in amphoræ; but it is old and costs ten carlini a bottle."

Day had fallen and night had come on, — a serene, transparent night, brighter unquestionably than noonday in London. Wonderfully soft were the azure tones of earth and the silvery reflections in the sky; the air was so still that the flame of the tapers placed on the table did not even quiver.

A young lad playing a flute drew near the table and remained standing, in the attitude of a bas-relief, gazing at the three guests and blowing into his soft, melodious instrument some of the popular cantilenes

in a minor key, the charm of which is so penetrating. Perhaps the lad was a direct descendant of the flute-player who walked before Duilius.

"Our meal is assuming quite an antique look. All we lack are Gaditanian dancers, and wreaths of ivy," said Fabio, as he poured himself out a bumper of Falernian.

"I feel like quoting Latin, as they do in newspapers. Stanzas keep recurring to my memory," added Max.

"Keep them to yourself," cried Octavian and Fabio, justly alarmed. "There is nothing so indigestible as Latin at table."

Conversation between young fellows who, with cigars in their mouths, their elbows on the table, contemplate a number of empty bottles, especially if the wine is heady, generally turns pretty quickly to the subject of women. Each of the three stated his views, which are here briefly summarised.

Fabio cared for beauty and youth only. Voluptuous and practical, he had no illusions or prejudices in matters of love. A peasant girl was just as good as a duchess, provided she was beautiful. He cared more for the beauty than for the dress. He made much fun of some of his friends who were captivated by a few

yards of lace and silk, and said it would be more reasonable to be in love with a dressmaker's show window. These opinions, very sound at bottom, and which he did not conceal, caused him to pass for an eccentric individual.

Max, less artistic than Fabio, cared only for difficult undertakings and complicated intrigues. He wanted to overcome resistance and seduce the virtuous; love to him was like a game of chess, with moves long meditated, effects suspended, surprises and stratagems worthy of Polybius. When he went into a drawing-room, the woman he chose to attack was the one who seemed least sympathetic to him. It was a delightful pleasure for him to make her pass from aversion to love by skilful gradations; to impose himself on those who repelled him, and to break down the wills that rebelled against his ascendency seemed to him the sweetest of triumphs. Like those sportsmen who traverse fields, woods, and plains in rain, snow, and sun, unmindful of fatigue, and with an ardour that nothing checks, for the sake of some wretched game, which they generally refuse to eat, Max, once he had secured his prey, ceased to care for it, and immediately started out in quest of another.

Octavian confessed that reality had no great attraction for him. Not that he indulged in school-boy dreams full of lilies and roses, but every woman was surrounded by too many prosaic and repellent facts, too many prosy fathers, coquettish mothers wearing real flowers in false hair, bright-faced cousins turning over declarations of love in their minds, ridiculous aunts fond of little dogs. An engraving after a painting by Horace Vernet or Delaroche hanging in a woman's room, sufficed to kill in his breast a rising passion. More poetical than amorous, he wanted a terrace on Isola Bella, on Lago Maggiore, with a fine moonlight, by way of setting for a rendezvous. He would have liked to remove his love from common life and to transport it to the stars. Consequently he had felt a mighty, impossible love for all the great feminine characters preserved by art or history; like Faust, he had loved Helen, and had wished that the undulations of centuries had brought to him one of those sublime incarnations of the desires and dreams of mankind, the form of which, invisible to vulgar eyes, ever subsists through time and space. He had formed an ideal seraglio with Semiramis, Aspasia, Cleopatra, Diana of Poitiers, Joan of Aragon. Sometimes, too, he fell in

love with statues, and one day, as he passed before the Venus of Milo in the Louvre, he had called out, "Oh, who will give you back your arms, so that you may press me to your marble breasts." At Rome, the sight of a thick tress of hair, exhumed from an antique tomb, had inspired him with a curious fancy. He had endeavoured, by means of two or three threads of the hair, purchased at the price of gold from the keeper and handed to a very powerful somnambulist, to call up the shadow and shape of this dead woman; but the conductive fluid had evaporated during the lapse of so many years, and the apparition had been unable to emerge from eternal night.

As Fabio had guessed when he saw his friend standing before the glass case in the Studj, the imprint found in the cellar of the house of Arrius Diomedes had excited in Octavian an insensate desire for a retrospective ideal. He was endeavouring to leave time and life behind and to transport his soul to the age of Titus.

Max and Fabio withdrew to their rooms, and, their heads somewhat heavy, thanks to the classic vapours of the Falernian, they speedily fell asleep. Octavian, who had repeatedly left his glass untouched before

him, — not caring to trouble by material intoxication the poetic fervour that seethed in his brain, — felt by the restlessness of his nerves that sleep would not come to him. He left the osteria slowly, to cool his brow and to quiet his thoughts in the air of night.

Unconsciously his feet took him to the dead city. He removed the wooden bar that closed it and ventured into the ruins. The white moonbeams illumined the wan houses, and divided the streets into two parts of silvery light and bluish shadow. This nocturnal light concealed with its delicate tints the ruinous state of the buildings. The broken columns, the cracked façades, the roofs broken down by the eruption, were not noticed as in the crude glare of noon. The parts that were lacking were filled in by half-tints, and an unexpected beam, like a touch of feeling in a sketch for a painting, suggested a whole fallen *ensemble*. The mighty genii of night seemed to have restored the fossil city for the performance of a strange life.

Sometimes, even, Octavian fancied he saw faint human shapes moving in the darkness, but they vanished as soon as they reached the lighted part. Soft whisperings, vague rumours, floated through the silence. He attributed these at first to the winking of his eyes

and the buzzing of his ears; he thought they must be due to optical illusions, the plaint of the sea breeze, or the hurried flight of a lizard or of an adder through the nettles; for everything lives in nature, even death; everything sounds, even silence. Nevertheless, he could not help a certain feeling of anxiety, a slight shudder, due perhaps to the chilly air of night. Twice or thrice he looked round. He did not feel alone in the deserted town as he had done a moment since. Could his comrades have done the same thing as he, and were they looking for him among the ruins? Were the shapes he had caught glimpses of Max and Fabio? Were the indistinct sounds of steps produced by them as they walked and chatted and disappeared round the corner of a square? Although this was a natural explanation, Octavian felt that it was not the correct one, and he failed to convince himself by any reasoning. The solitude and the shadow were peopled by invisible beings whom he had disturbed. He had come plump into the middle of a mystery, and it seemed as though his departure were awaited before anything could begin. Such were the absurd ideas which came into his mind, and which assumed much likelihood, owing to the time, the place, and the numerous causes

of terror that will easily recur to those who have been in some great ruin at night.

As he passed before a house which he had noticed during the day, and on which the moon was shining brightly, he saw, in a state of complete restoration, a portico which he had endeavoured to reconstruct in his mind. Four Doric columns fluted half-way up, the shaft covered with a coat of red like a purple drapery, supported a cyma covered with polychrome ornaments, which seemed to have been finished but the day before. On the side wall of the door a Laconian mastiff in encaustic, accompanied by the usual legend, *Cave canem*, was baying at the moon and at visitors with painted fury. Above the mosaic threshold the word *Have* in Oscan and Latin characters welcomed the guests with its friendly syllables. The outer walls, painted red and yellow, showed not a single crevice. The house was higher by one story, and the tile roof, topped by a bronze acroter, exhibited a perfect profile against the pale-blue sky, in which glimmered a few stars.

This strange restoration, carried out between afternoon and night by some unknown architect, greatly bothered Octavian, who was quite certain that during

the day he had seen that same house in a very ruinous condition. The mysterious restorer had worked very fast, for the neighbouring dwellings had a similar recent and new look. All the pillars were topped by capitals; not a stone, not a brick, not a pellicle of stucco, not a morsel of paint was lacking on the brilliant walls of the façades, and through the peristyles he could see, round the marble basin in the cavædium, white and rose laurels, myrtles, and pomegranate trees. History was at fault; there had been no eruption, or the hand of time had gone back twenty centuries upon the dial of eternity.

Octavian, filled with deepest surprise, asked himself whether he was sleeping standing or whether he was walking in a dream. He examined himself seriously to ascertain whether delirium were evoking hallucinations in his mind; but he was compelled to recognise that he was neither sleeping nor mad. A singular change had taken place in the atmosphere. Faint rosy tints mingled their violet gradations with the azure beams of the moon. The heavens were growing lighter on the horizon. It seemed as if day were about to dawn. Octavian looked at his watch; it pointed to midnight. Fancying it might have stopped,

he touched the repeater spring. The repeater sounded twelve times. It was midnight unquestionably, and yet the light kept on brightening, the moon was disappearing in the azure, which was becoming more and more luminous; the sun was rising.

Then Octavian, in whose mind the notion of time was becoming confused, was fain to admit that he was walking, not in dead Pompeii, — the cold corpse of a city half drawn from its shroud, — but in a living, young, intact Pompeii, on which the burning mud torrents of Vesuvius had not yet flowed. An inexplicable miracle had just carried him back, a Frenchman of the nineteenth century, to the days of Titus, not in spirit but in reality; or else it was bringing back to him from the depths of the past a destroyed city, with its vanished inhabitants; for at that moment a man wearing an antique costume emerged from a neighbouring house.

The man wore his hair short and was smooth shaven. He had on a brown tunic and a grayish cloak, the ends of which were turned up so as not to impede his steps. He walked rapidly, almost ran, and passed Octavian without seeing him. On his arm he carried an esparto basket and he was going towards the Forum. There

was no doubt about it, he was a slave, a Davus going to market.

The sound of wheels was heard. An antique cart, drawn by white oxen and laden with vegetables, entered the street. By the oxen walked a driver with bare legs tanned by the sun, sandals on his feet, and wearing a sort of linen shirt puffed out at the waist. A pointed straw hat thrown behind his back and fastened round his neck by a strap, showed his head, of a type unknown at the present day; a low brow with hard bumps, black, crinkly hair, a straight nose, eyes as soft as those of the oxen, and a neck like that of a country Hercules. He gravely touched his animals with the goad, assuming a statuesque pose that would have made Ingres go into ecstasies. He noticed Octavian and seemed surprised, but went on his way. He did turn round once, no doubt unable to understand the presence of that personage, strange to him, but with his placid rustic stupidity leaving cleverer men than he to read the riddle.

Campanian peasants also came, driving before them asses bearing skins of wine and tinkling their brazen bells. Their faces were as different from those of our modern peasants as medals differ from pennies.

The town was gradually filling up with people, like one of those panorama pictures that show deserted at first and which a change in the light fills with people invisible before.

Octavian's feelings had now changed. A moment ago, in the deceitful darkness of night, he had been a prey to that uneasiness which the bravest cannot avoid when reason fails to explain troubling, fantastic circumstances. His vague terror was replaced by deep stupefaction. He could not understand the evidence of his senses, in view of the clearness of his perceptions, and yet what he beheld was absolutely incredible. Still not quite convinced, he sought by noting small realistic details to assure himself that he was not the plaything of a hallucination. It could not be phantoms that filed past him, for the brilliant light of the sun illumined them with unmistakable reality, and their shadows, lengthened in the morning light, were cast on the pavements and the walls.

Unable to understand what was happening to him, Octavian, at bottom delighted at seeing one of his dearest dreams realised, let himself go and simply watched all these marvels without attempting to understand them. He said to himself that since in virtue

of some mysterious power he was enabled to live for a few hours in a vanished age, he was not going to lose his time in the solution of an incomprehensible problem; and he continued bravely on his way, looking right and left at a prospect which was to him at once so new and so old.

But what was the particular period in the life of Pompeii into which he had been transported? The names of the public personages in an ædile's inscription engraved on the wall enabled him to ascertain that he was at the beginning of the reign of Titus, — that is, in the year 79 of the Christian era. A sudden thought flashed into Octavian's mind. The woman whose imprint he had admired in the Naples Museum must be alive, since the eruption of Vesuvius, in which she had perished, had taken place on August 24 in that year; so it was possible for him to find her, to see her, to speak to her. The great desire which he had experienced at the sight of those ashes moulded upon divine contours, was perhaps to be satisfied; for nothing could be impossible to a love that could compel time to go backwards, and the same hour to pass twice through the hour-glass of eternity.

While Octavian indulged in these reflections, hand-

some young maids were going to the fountains, supporting with the tips of their white fingers the jars they balanced on their heads. Patricians in white togæ bordered with purple bands, and followed by their train of clients, were proceeding to the Forum. Purchasers crowded round the shops; each of which was distinguished by a carved and painted sign, and recalled by its small size and its shape the Moorish shops in Algiers. Above most of the stalls a splendid phallus in coloured terra cotta, bearing the words *hic habitat felicitas*, gave proof of superstitious precautions against the evil eye. Octavian noticed even an amulet shop, the show-case of which was filled with horns, branches of coral, and small golden Priapæ, such as are still to be found in Naples, as defences against jettatura, whereupon he remarked to himself that superstition was more durable than religion even.

Following the pavement, which borders every street in Pompeii, — the English being thus deprived of the honour of having invented that comfort, — Octavian came face to face with a handsome young fellow of about his own age, wearing a saffron-coloured tunic, and draped in a mantle of fine white wool as soft as cashmere. The sight of Octavian, wearing the hid-

eous modern hat, an ugly black frock-coat, his legs pinioned in trousers, his feet fastened in by shining boots, appeared to surprise the young Pompeian as much as the sight of a Redskin or a Botocudo with his feathers, his necklace of grizzly-bear claws and his queer tattooing would surprise us on the Boulevard. However, as he was a well-bred young man, he did not burst out laughing in Octavian's face, and taking pity on the poor barbarian lost in the Greco-Roman city, he said to him in a gently modulated voice: —

"*Advena, salve.*"

It was quite natural that an inhabitant of Pompeii in the reign of the divine Emperor Titus, Most Powerful and Most August, should speak Latin; yet Octavian started on hearing that dead language spoken by a living mouth. Then he congratulated himself on having been one of the best Latin students and carried off prizes in the competitions. The Latin taught in the University served him for once, and recalling his class-room experience, he replied to the Pompeian's welcome in the style of *De viribus illustribus* and of *Selectæ e profanis*, in a fairly intelligible manner, but with a Parisian accent which compelled the young man to smile.

"Perhaps it is easier for you to speak Greek," said the Pompeian. "I know that language too, for I studied at Athens."

"I know even less Greek than Latin," replied Octavian. "I am from Gaul, from Paris, from Lutetia."

"I know that country. My ancestor made war in Gaul under the great Julius Cæsar. But what a curious dress you wear! The Gauls I saw at Rome were not dressed like that."

Octavian attempted to make the young Pompeian understand that twenty centuries had passed since the conquest of Gaul by Julius Cæsar, and that fashions had possibly changed in the meantime. But his Latin was not sufficient for the purpose; and indeed, it did not amount to much.

"I am called Rufus Holconius, and my house is yours," said the young man; "unless you prefer the freedom of the tavern. You can be quite comfortable at the inn of Albinus, near the gate of the Augustus Felix suburb, and in the hostelry of Sarinus, the son of Publius, near the second tower; but if you have no objection, I should be glad to show you through the city, which is strange to you. I like you, you young barbarian, although you did try to play on my credulity

by pretending that Emperor Titus, who is reigning at this moment, died two thousand years ago, and that the Nazarene, whose abominable followers, covered with pitch, lighted up the gardens of Nero, alone reigns as master in the deserted heavens whence the great gods have fallen. By Pollux," he added, glancing at a red inscription on a corner of a street, "you have come at the right moment. They are playing Plautus' *Casina*, recently put again on the stage. It is a curious and comical play, which will amuse you, even if you can make out no more than the gestures. Follow me, for it will soon begin. I will have you placed in the seats for guests and strangers."

Hereupon Rufus Holconius walked off toward the small comic theatre which the three friends had visited during the course of the day.

The Frenchman and the Pompeian walked through the Street of the Fountain of Abundance, the Street of Theatres, passed by the College and the Temple of Isis, the Sculptor's Studio, and entered the Odeon, or comic theatre, by a side entrance. Thanks to the recommendation of Holconius, Octavian was placed near the proscenium. Every glance was immediately

turned upon him with kindly curiosity, and light whisperings ran all about the amphitheatre.

The play had not yet begun. Octavian turned the time to account by examining the hall. The semicircular benches, ending at each extremity in a magnificent lion's paw, carved out of Vesuvian lava, rose and broadened from an empty space answering to our orchestra stalls, but much smaller and paved with a mosaic of Greek marbles; a broader bench formed every here and there a distinctive zone, and four staircases corresponding to the entrances, and ascending from the base to the summit of the amphitheatre, divided it into four wedges, wider at the top than at the bottom. The spectators, provided with tickets consisting of small ivory counters on which were marked the compartment, the wedge, and the bench, with the title of the play to be performed and the name of the author, found their places without difficulty. The magistrates and nobles, the married men, the young men, the soldiers with their gleaming bronze helmets, had separate seats. The beautiful togas and the full white mantles, well draped, spreading over the lower steps and contrasting with the varied dresses of the women, who were seated above, and the gray capes

of the common people, relegated to the upper benches near the pillars supporting the roof, between which one could see a sky as intensely blue as the azure field of a panathena, formed a wonderful spectacle. A fine spray of water, scented with saffron, fell in imperceptible drops from the friezes, and perfumed the air while cooling it. Octavian recalled the fetid emanations that poison the atmosphere of our theatres, so incommodious that they may be considered places of torture, and came to the conclusion that civilisation had not improved greatly.

The curtain, supported by a transverse beam, fell below the orchestra. The musicians seated themselves in their tribune, and Prologue appeared, dressed grotesquely, his head covered with an ugly mask, put on like a helmet.

Prologue, after having bowed to the audience and called for applause, began to make an argument. "Old plays," he said, "were like wine, which improves with use; and *Casina*, dear to the elders, should surely not be less dear to the young. All could enjoy it, the former because they were acquainted with it, the latter because they did not yet know it. For the rest, the play had been carefully restored, and the spec-

tators ought to listen to it free from care, without thinking of their debts or their creditors, for no arrests could be made at a theatre. It was a lucky day, the weather was fine, and the halcyons were soaring over the Forum." Then he gave a summary of the comedy which the actors were about to perform, at such length that it is clear surprise had little to do with the pleasure the ancients took in dramatic performances. He stated that the old man Stalino, in love with his beautiful slave Casina, proposed to marry her to his farmer Olympio, a complaisant husband, whose place he was to occupy on the wedding night; and that Lycostrata, Stalino's wife, to checkmate her vicious husband's lust, proposed to marry Casina to the equerry Chalinus, with the intention of favouring her son's amours; finally, how Stalino, completely taken in, mistook a disguised slave youth for Casina, who, on its being found that she was free and of ingenuous birth, wedded the young master, whom she loved and by whom she was beloved.

The young Frenchman paid little attention to the actors with their bronze-mouthed masks as they performed on the stage. The slaves ran hither and thither to simulate haste; the old man wagged his

head and held out his trembling hands; the matron, loud-voiced, with sour and disdainful look, asserted her importance and scolded her husband, to the great delight of the spectators The actors entered and went out by three doors, cut in the wall at the back, and leading to the actors' foyer. Stalino's house was at one corner of the stage, and opposite was that of his old friend Alcesimus. The setting, though very well painted, rather gave an idea of the place than represented it, like the non-characteristic stage-setting of the classic tragedy.

When the nuptial procession escorting the sham Casina entered on the stage, a great burst of laughter, such as Homer describes the laughter of the gods to be, ran along every bench in the amphitheatre, and thunders of applause awoke the echoes of the place. But Octavian no longer listened or looked, for in the compartment occupied by the women he had just caught sight of a wonderful beauty. From that minute the lovely faces which had attracted him were eclipsed, as the stars are eclipsed by Phœbe. Everything vanished, and disappeared as in a dream. A mist seemed to cover the benches that swarmed with people, and the shrill voices of the actors seemed lost in

infinite distance. He felt at his heart a sort of electric shock, and when that woman's glance was turned upon him, he felt that sparks flashed from his breast.

She was dark and pale; her wavy, curly hair, black as night, was slightly drawn back on the temples in the Greek fashion, and in her white face shone sombre, soft eyes, full of an indefinable expression of voluptuous sadness and weariness of passion. Her mouth, disdainfully curved at the corners, protested by the ardent brilliancy of its flaming purple against the placid whiteness of the face. Her neck had those lovely, pure lines which nowadays are to be seen on statues only. Her arms were bare to the shoulder, and from the tips of her proud breasts, that lifted her rose mauve-coloured tunic, fell two folds that might have been carved in marble by Phidias or Cleomenes.

The sight of those breasts, so perfect in contour, so pure in outline, filled Octavian with emotion. It seemed to him that they exactly fitted the hollow imprints in the Museum of Naples, which had cast him into such an ardent reverie, and a voice called out from within his heart that that was the woman who had been stifled by the ashes of Vesuvius in the villa of Arrius Diomedes. By what miracle did he now behold her

alive, present at the performance of Plautus' *Casina?* He did not attempt to understand it. For the matter of that, how did he happen to be there himself? He accepted her presence as in dreams we accept the intervention of people who have long since died and who nevertheless act as if they were still living. Besides, his emotion checked his reasoning powers. As far as he was concerned, the wheel of time was thrown out of its rut, and his victorious desire had chosen its own place amid the vanished centuries. He found himself face to face with his dream, one of the least realisable, a retrospective chimera. All at once his life was filled out.

As he gazed upon that face, so calm and yet so full of passion, he understood that he beheld his first and last love, that he had before him his cup of supreme intoxication. He felt the remembrances of all the women he thought he had loved vanishing like faint shadows, and his soul became virgin of any anterior emotion. The past disappeared.

Meanwhile, the beautiful Pompeian girl, resting her chin upon the palm of her hand, cast upon Octavian, while appearing to watch the stage, the velvety glance of her darksome eyes, a glance that fell upon him

heavy and burning, like a jet of molten lead. Then she leaned and whispered to a girl seated by her side.

The performance was over. The crowd passed out of the exits. Octavian, refusing the proffered service of his guide Holconius, sprang out of the first exit which he came upon. He had scarcely reached the door, when he felt a hand on his arm, and a feminine voice whispered to him, low, but so distinctly that he lost not a word, —

"I am Tyche Nevoleia, and I minister to the pleasures of Arria Marcella, daughter of Arrius Diomedes. My mistress loves you; follow me."

Arria Marcella had just entered her litter, borne by four strong Syrian slaves, nude to the belt, their bronze torsos shining in the sun. The curtains of the litter were drawn apart, and a white hand, covered with rings, was waving in friendly fashion to Octavian, as if to confirm the message borne by the servant. The purple curtain closed, and the litter went off, to the cadenced step of the slaves.

Tyche led Octavian through side streets, crossing from one to another by stepping lightly upon stones which connected the pavements, and between which

passed the car wheels, making her way through the labyrinth with the readiness that comes of familiarity with a city. Octavian observed that he was traversing portions of Pompeii which had not yet been excavated, and which consequently were wholly unknown to him. This curious circumstance, amid so many other curious circumstances, did not surprise him. He had made up his mind to be astonished at nothing. In all this archaic phantasmagoria, which would have driven an archæologist crazy with delight, he saw but the dark, deep glance of Arria Marcella, and her splendid bosom, triumphant over the ages, which destruction itself sought to preserve.

They reached a concealed door, that opened and immediately closed, and Octavian found himself in a court surrounded by Ionic columns of Greek marble, painted half-way up a bright yellow, the capitals picked out with red and blue ornaments. A plant of aristolochia hung its broad, heart-shaped leaves from the corners of the building, like a natural arabesque, and near a basin bordered with plants, a rose flamingo stood on one leg, like a feather flower among the vegetable flowers. Frescoed panels, representing fanciful buildings or landscapes, adorned the walls. Octavian noted

these details with a rapid glance, for Tyche handed him over to the slaves who attended the baths, and who, in spite of his impatience, compelled him to undergo all the refinements of the baths of antiquity. After having passed through the different degrees of vapourized heat, borne with the scraper of the rubber, and had poured over him perfumes, cosmetics, and oil, he was clothed in a white tunic, and at the farther door found Tyche, who took his hand and led him into another richly ornamented room.

On the ceiling were painted, with a purity of drawing, a brilliancy of colour, and a freedom of touch that marked a great master and not a mere decorator, Mars, Venus, and Cupid; a frieze composed of stags, hares, and birds, playing amid foliage, ran around the room above a wainscotting of Cipoline marble; the mosaic of the flooring, a wonderful piece of work, which was perhaps done by Sosimus of Pergamus, represented banqueting meats admirably executed.

At the back of the room, on a biclinium, or bed for two persons, leaned Arria Marcella, in a voluptuous, serene pose that recalled the resting woman carved by Phidias on the front of the Parthenon. Her pearl-embroidered shoes lay at the foot of the bed, and her

lovely bare feet, purer than white marble, showed from under a light linen coverlet.

Two urns shaped like balances, with a pearl in each scale, shimmered in the light by her pale cheeks; a necklace of golden balls, from which hung pear-shaped drops, gleamed upon the bosom half revealed by the careless opening of a straw-coloured peplum, bordered with a black fret; a gold and black band shone in her auburn hair; for she had changed her dress on returning from the theatre, and round her arm, like the asp round Cleopatra's arm, was a golden serpent, with eyes formed of precious stones, trying to bite its tail.

A small table supported on griffins' feet, and inlaid with mother-of-pearl, silver, and ivory, stood by the bed, laden with various dishes served in gold and silver plate, or on china enamelled with precious paintings. There was a pheasant with its feathers on, and various fruits that ripen at different seasons.

There was every indication that a guest was expected. Fresh-cut flowers were strewn on the ground, and the amphoræ of wine were plunged in urns full of snow.

Arria Marcella signed to Octavian to lie down by her on the biclinium and to share the meal. The young man, half crazed with surprise and love, ate a

few mouthfuls from the dishes held out to him by little Asiatic slaves with curly hair and short tunics. Arria did not eat, but she often bore to her lips an opalescent Myrrhine cup filled with a dark purple wine, like coagulated blood. As she drank, from her heart, which had not beat for so many years, a faint rosy flush rose to her pale cheeks, but her bare arm, which Octavian touched as he raised his cup, was cold as a serpent's skin or a marble tombstone.

"Oh, when you stopped at the Studj to look at the piece of hardened clay which has preserved my shape," said Arria Marcella, as she cast a deep moist glance upon Octavian, "and when your thought rushed ardently to me, my soul felt it in the world in which I float, invisible to material eyes. Belief makes a god, and love makes woman. One really dies only when no longer loved. Your desire has restored me to life; the mighty evocation of your heart has suppressed the distance which separated us."

This view of amorous evocation, expressed by the young woman, coincided with the philosophical belief of Octavian, — a belief which I am much inclined to share. For, in truth, nothing dies; everything goes on existing. No power can annihilate whatever has once

been created. Every act, every word, every shape, every thought which has fallen into the universal ocean of things makes circles which go on broadening to the far confines of eternity. Material configurations disappear only to the common glance; their spectres people the infinite. Paris still carries away Helen to some unknown region of bliss; the silken sails of Cleopatra's galley still swell on some blue ideal Cydnus. Some passionate minds, endowed with a powerful will, have succeeded in recalling to themselves ages apparently vanished, and have revived people dead to others. Faust had the daughter of Tyndarus for a mistress, and took her to his Gothic castle from the mysterious depths of Hades. Octavian had just lived one day in the reign of Titus, and had made himself beloved of Arria Marcella, who was lying at this moment by him on an antique bed, in a city that for every one else was destroyed.

"By the disgust other women inspire me with," said Octavian, "by the irresistible thought which drew me to its own radiant types in the depths of the ages, as towards stars calling to me, I understood that I should never love save outside all time and space. You are the one I waited for, and the faint trace preserved by

man's curiosity placed me in relation with your soul through secret magnetism. I know not whether you are a dream or a reality, a phantom or a woman; whether, like Ixion, I am clasping a cloud to my breast, or whether I am the plaything of a sorcerer's foul charm; but what I do know is that you shall be my first and my last love."

"May Eros, son of Aphrodite, hear your vow," said Arria Marcella, resting her head upon her lover's shoulder, as he drew her to him in a passionate embrace. "Oh, press me to your young breast, envelop me with your warm breath; I am cold from having remained so long without love."

And Octavian felt that beautiful bosom, the mould of which he had that very morning admired through the glass of a case in the Museum, rising and falling against his breast. He felt the coolness of the lovely flesh through his tunic. It burned him. The black and gold band had fallen from Arria's head, which was thrown back in a passion of love, and her hair was spread like a black river upon the blue pillow.

The slaves had removed the table. Naught was heard but a confused sound of kisses and sighs. The tame quails, heedless of this amorous scene, were chirp-

ing and picking upon the mosaic floor the remains of the feast.

Suddenly the brazen rings of the portière that closed the room slid along the pole, and an old man of severe appearance, robed in a great brown mantle, appeared on the threshold. He wore his gray beard in two points, like the Nazarenes. His face appeared wrinkled by fatigue and maceration; a small cross of black wood hung round his neck, leaving no doubt as to his belief: he belonged to the sect, then recently established, of the disciples of Christ.

At sight of him Arria Marcella, overwhelmed with confusion, concealed her face in a fold of her mantle, like a bird that conceals its head under its wing in the presence of a foe it cannot avoid, so as to escape at least the horror of seeing it, while Octavian, leaning on his elbow, looked fixedly at the troublesome individual who had thus abruptly broken in upon his enjoyment.

"Arria, Arria," said the austere individual, in a tone of reproach, "was not your lifetime sufficient for your dissipation, and must your infamous loves trespass upon the ages which do not belong to you? Can you not leave the living within their sphere? Have your ashes

not cooled since the day you died unrepentant under the volcano's rain of fire? Have two thousand years of death not quieted you, and do your greedy arms still draw to your heartless marble bosom the poor mad men intoxicated by your spells?"

"Have mercy on me, father Arrius; do not overwhelm me in the name of that morose religion which never was mine. I believe in our old gods, who loved life, youth, beauty, and pleasure. Do not plunge me back into wan nothingness; let me enjoy the life which love has restored to me."

"Silence, impious one; speak not of your gods that are but fiends. Let go that man, enchained by your impure seductions; cease attracting him outside the circle of his life measured out by God; return into the limbo of paganism with your Asiatic, Roman, and Greek lovers. Young Christian, do thou abandon that larva, which would seem to thee more hideous than the Empusæ and Phorcydes, if thou couldst see her such as she is."

Octavian, pale and frozen with horror, strove to speak, but his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

"Will you obey, Arria?" cried the tall old man, imperiously.

"Never," replied Arria, her eyes flashing, her nos-

trils dilated, her lips quivering, as she clasped Octavian in her lovely statue-like arms, cold, hard, and rigid like marble. Her proud beauty, exasperated by the struggle, shone with supernal brilliancy at this supreme moment, as if to leave to her young lover an unforgettable remembrance.

"Well, then, evil one," replied the old man, "I shall have to use serious measures and make your nothingness palpable and visible to that fascinated youth."

Whereupon he uttered in a voice of command a formula of exorcism that drove from Arria's cheeks the rosy tints they owed to the black wine in the Myrrhine cup.

At that moment the distant bell of one of the villages on the seashore, or of one of the hamlets nestling in the folds of the mountain, sounded the angelic Salutation.

As she heard it, an agonizing sigh broke from the young woman. Octavian felt the arms that clasped him grow limp. The draperies that covered her fell back of themselves as if the contours that supported them had disappeared, and the unfortunate nocturnal wanderer saw by his side on the festal bed nothing but a handful of ashes and shapeless remains mingled with

calcined bones, among which gleamed bracelets and golden jewels, such as must have been discovered when the house of Arrius Diomedes was excavated. — He uttered a terrible cry and swooned away. The old man had disappeared, the sun was rising, and the hall, so brilliantly adorned but a moment before, was now only a dismal ruin.

After a heavy sleep caused by the libations of the evening before, Max and Fabio awoke with a start, and their first thought was to summon their companion, whose room was near theirs, by one of those burlesque rallying-cries which young fellows sometimes agree upon when travelling. Octavian did not reply, for excellent reasons. Fabio and Max, receiving no reply, entered their friend's room, and perceived that he had not slept in his bed at all. "He must have been unable to get back to his bed, and have gone to sleep in a chair," said Fabio, "for he has not a very strong head, and then probably went out early to work off the fumes of the wine in the morning air."

"He had not drunk very much," added Max, reflectively. "This seems rather strange to me. Let's go and find him."

The two friends, with the assistance of the guide, traversed every street, every lane, every square and place in Pompeii; entered every curious house in which they fancied Octavian might be copying a painting or an inscription, and finally found him senseless on the disjoined mosaics of a small half-ruinous room. They brought him to his senses with much difficulty. When he had come to himself, he gave no other explanation save that the fancy had occurred to him of seeing Pompeii by moonlight, and that he had been seized with a fit that would probably have no ill results.

The little company returned to Naples by railway as they had come, and that evening, in their box at San Carlo, Max and Fabio watched through their glasses a band of nymphs skipping around in a ballet, supporting Ammalia Ferraris, the then popular dancer, and who wore under their gauze skirts hideous drawers of a monstrous green, that made them look like frogs stung by a tarantula. Octavian, pale, his eyes dim, with a look of weariness on his face, did not seem to notice what was going on on the stage, so difficult was it for him, after the marvellous adventure of the night, to re-enter into the feeling of real life.

From that day Octavian became the victim of a sombre melancholy which the high spirits and jokes of his companions increased rather than relieved. The image of Arria Marcella pursued him constantly, and the sad ending of his fantastic love affair did not destroy its charms. Unable to resist the desire, he returned secretly to Pompeii, and again, as on the former occasion, walked through the ruins by moonlight, his heart filled with insensate hope; but the hallucination was not renewed. He saw only the lizards fleeing over the stones, and heard only the calls of the terrified night-birds. He did not meet his friend Rufus Holconius; Tyche's slender hand did not rest on his arm; and Arria Marcella obstinately remained dust.

As a last resort Octavian recently married a young and lovely English girl, who is madly in love with him. He has turned out a perfect husband, and yet Helen, with that secret instinct of the heart that cannot be deceived, feels that her husband is in love with some one else — but with whom? The most active spying has failed to give her any information. Octavian does not keep a ballet-girl, and in society he pays ladies merely commonplace compliments. He even received very coolly the marked advances of a Russian princess, fa-

mous for her beauty and her coquetry. A secret drawer, which the suspicious Helen opened during her husband's absence, furnished no proof of infidelity. But then it would never have occurred to her to be jealous of Arria Marcella, daughter of Arrius Diomedes, a freedman of Tiberius.

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THE QUARTETTE

Introduction

IT is probably impossible for the present generation of Europeans, and certainly for Americans, to understand the passionate devotion felt by Frenchmen, towards the latter part of the first half of the nineteenth century for the great Napoleon. While it is true that millions of the French had breathed easier when he fell at Waterloo, and the end of the long years of war that had sent the best, the flower, of French youth to fall on foreign and home battle-fields had come, there occurred before long a tremendous reaction in favour of the Emperor. Several causes contributed to this: in the first place, the victory of Waterloo brought in its train invasion and armed occupancy of the territory; then the Bourbons, restored by foreign arms, exhibited the most absolute unintelligence of the changed conditions of the country and of society; further, the exile of the fallen Emperor to Saint Helena, while

quite justified by considerations of policy and humanity, aroused the deepest irritation in every French breast that still conserved the feeling of national pride and devotion to the man who had so long incarnated the military glory of a people ever fond of war and signally victorious on so many different fields and in so many diverse countries. These feelings became all the stronger as time passed and the recollections of the fearful sufferings that Napoleon had caused passed away, as all such recollections will pass. There then sprang up a Napoleonic legend, to which poets, historians, dramatists, painters, singers, politicians all contributed in turns or together. Napoleon became the incarnation of triumphant France, and men recalled with swelling breasts that under him the nation had dictated terms of peace to the sovereigns of Europe in the capital of each of them. The glorious epic of so many years' duration excited and inflamed all imaginations, and the genuineness of the sufferings of the illustrious captive lent an additional glamour to the memory of him that was so sedulously cultivated. Béranger's songs were on all lips; Hugo, who, in his first poems, had heaped obloquy upon "the tyrant," changed his views and ere long became

an almost fanatical worshipper of the great warrior. The tide set more and more strongly in favour of the lost leader, and the French were ready to acclaim again any one bearing the name of Napoleon, — a name that was indeed one to conjure with, as was shortly afterwards proved.

When Louis-Philippe obtained leave to bring back to France the ashes of the dead Emperor, and sent the Prince de Joinville with a frigate to Saint Helena, the whole of France was in an indescribable state of ferment and excitement. The translation of the remains from the lone islet in the Atlantic to the superb resting-place prepared for them under the Dome of the Invalides on the Champ de Mars, was the signal for an outburst of patriotic and military fervour that has perhaps never been equalled, and certainly never surpassed in France. It was on this occasion that Victor Hugo wrote his magnificent "The Return of the Emperor," three stanzas from which may here be quoted, as expressing the very thoughts that led Gautier to the selection of the theme he has developed in "The Quartette," and which will, therefore make the meaning of the tale plainer to the modern reader: —

"Saint Helena! — O lesson! O fall! Warning! Agony!
England, her hate to satisfy her whole genius using,
In open day the great man 'gan to devour;
And once again men beheld the Homeric sight:
The fetters, the rock burned by scorching Afric sun,
The Titan, — and the vulture!

"But now these tortures, that mighty sorrow,
The Punic rage, the rancour implacable
That made the Great Crucified bleed,
Th' affronts that smote every soul of pride,
Like deep vase wherein pours a fountain's stream,
Slowly the whole world with pity filled.

"Pity from noble hearts springing! Cry of the wide world!
These angered thee in thy shadow, thou British gaoler!
For admiration, with its sov'ran flame,
Hardens vile man and softens great souls.
Alas! when weeps the brave, the coward laughs; for fire
The mud doth dry, but melteth bronze."

Gautier started to write a sort of historical novel, with just enough history in it to account for the choice of the subject and to interest the French reader; for the tale was intended for home consumption, or at most for perusal by the foes of England, who would willingly enjoy abuse of the country that had saved Europe and whose crowning triumph at Waterloo had not been

altogether palatable even to the enemies of Napoleon. Chauvinism, as the French term it, jingoism, as the modern term is, was as rampant in 1848 as at the present day, and the author who dexterously appealed to it was sure of a large audience and of a ready sale for his works.

But Gautier, while sufficiently chauvinistic in this story to satisfy all but the most exacting fanatics of Napoleonism, introduced a clever variation of the theme in making the attempted rescue of the illustrious captive the work of Englishmen instead of Frenchmen. By doing this, he laid heavier condemnation upon England herself, since he showed, to the satisfaction of the readers of *la Presse*, at least, that even in perfidious Albion there were men as devoted admirers of the Little Corporal as any that could be found within the confines of fair France. This clever artifice, for it is scarcely more, enabled Gautier to indulge safely in the most extraordinary representation of English life and manners, which no one can read at the present day without a smile. But his object was, not to represent the manners and customs of a land he knew but slightly, — for his trips to London had not been devoted to a serious observation of the

people, — it was to write a dramatically interesting story that should move deeply the public to which it was addressed; a public that devoured it greedily, since it flattered its vanity, and justified its admiration for Napoleon and its hatred for Sir Hudson Lowe.

Neither probability, therefore, nor an accurate picture of English life and ways is to be looked for in this story, which is more in the style of Balzac's famous "History of the Thirteen" than in that of the modern historical novel. Most probably Gautier was inspired both by that celebrated work and by his own recollections of the Society of the Red Horse, of which he has given an account in his study on Balzac, and of which he was himself a member. Indeed, his description of the junta to which de Volmerange, Arundel, Daksha, and the other prominent characters belonged, recalls at once both the formidable association of which Ferragus was the head, and the less redoubtable Red Horse. The adventures of the personages, the breaking of the matches at the very church door and in the nuptial chamber, the mysterious brig, the underground passage to the Thames, the Indian mutiny, the conspiracy for the liberation of Napoleon and the setting of the Emperor on the

throne of India, recall constantly the somewhat grandiloquent schemes that Balzac is fond of ascribing to the men he sets moving in his vast "Comédie humaine."

But if the reader is willing to take things for granted, and to allow Gautier to have his own way, he is sure to enjoy the extraordinary adventures and the astounding complications which the author has evolved for his entertainment. In other words, the book is not to be taken seriously as an attempt to produce a true historical novel, but merely as a brilliant emanation of the author's imagination.

"The Quartette" appeared in the columns of *la Presse*, from September 20 to October 15, 1848, the very year in which Louis-Philippe was being driven from the throne, to be succeeded by Louis Napoleon, first as President of the French Republic, and then as Emperor of the French. It was published in book form in 1851.

The Quartette

THE QUARTETTE

I

THE pale November dawn, not yet very wide-awake, was rubbing its eyes behind a curtain of gray clouds, and already the worthy innkeeper Geordie was standing at the door of his hostel, his arms crossed as far as he could over a vast paunch that testified most eloquently to the excellence of the cookery at the Red Lion. He had the perfectly satisfied air of an innkeeper who, being the only one in the place, feels that he is master of the situation and is not afraid that travellers will escape him; for at that time the Red Lion was the only inn in Folkestone.

At the time of the story we are about to relate, Folkestone was a little village, the yellow brick and timbered houses of which rose irregularly on the slope that leads from the summit of the cliff to the sea. Geordie's house was one of the handsomest, if not the handsomest, in the place. At the corner of the build-

ing, at the end of an elegantly twisted iron volute, swung in the sea-breeze a red lion of tin, the paint on which, owing to the salt mists of the ocean, had to be frequently renewed. This having been recently done, the sign glowed as brightly as a lion gules on a field or in a manual of heraldry.

Geordie was thinking, but his thoughts were in no wise poetical. He was calculating in his own mind the profits of the preceding months. Geordie reasoned that if the increase kept up, he might in a short time purchase the piece of ground which he coveted and which cut so unpleasantly into his own land.

He had just got to this point, when a grim-looking individual who had been standing before him for a few moments past and whom he had not observed, owing to his preoccupation, apparently thinking that there was no other way of being noticed, slapped him on the stomach in the way that thin, bony men like to do to stout men, either through irony or facetiousness.

Angered by this familiarity in very bad taste, which was peculiarly disagreeable to him and which he scarcely put up with from his intimate friends and his rich customers, Geordie sprang backwards with remarkable agility for a man of his size, and seeing that his

aggressor was dressed in a way that did not betoken wealth, he mentally reasoned thus: "This fellow will at most eat a slice of beef and drink a pint of half-and-half and a glass of whiskey, and yet he is as insolent as a nobleman who has for supper a fine pullet washed down with claret and champagne. I do not risk losing more than a shilling and a few pence by speaking plainly to him."

"Well, you brute, you fool, you ass, you ill-bred dolt!" cried Geordie, after the mental reasoning which I have just transcribed. "Is that the way to enter into conversation with well-bred people? I am sorry for those who brought you up."

"Don't get excited, my stout friend. Could I go on standing before you, stuck like a post, until the Day of Judgment? I coughed three times and twice called you by your name, Master Geordie; yet you moved no more than a hogshead. I had to make you feel my presence," answered in a sarcastic tone free from fear and repentance the individual who had just slapped the Falstaff-like paunch of the worthy innkeeper.

"You might have drawn attention to yourself in a more delicate way," returned Master Geordie, in a still

indignant tone, to which, however, the firm speech and assured glance of the stranger had already imparted a more timid inflection.

"Come, you hospitable elephant, clear your own door if I am to pass and enter the coffee-room of the Red Lion inn, the best one in Folkestone."

Master Geordie, who was well acquainted with humankind and with the pitiful look which the consciousness of an empty purse brings to a face, judged from the coolness of the stranger and the freedom of his manners that, notwithstanding his modest dress, he was probably fairly well off and would call for a bottle of French wine, or at least a cup of Canary sack; so, temporarily sacrificing his dignity, he drew back as well as he could and allowed his aggressor to enter the house.

The coffee-room of the Red Lion, lighted by four windows, the sashes of which hung on counterweights, and which have been called guillotines since the invention of that philanthropic instrument, was divided into several wooden boxes not unlike private rooms and recalling the shape and arrangement of loose boxes in stables: for an Englishman is so fond of being alone that he feels uncomfortable in the sight of his kind,

and has to establish a separation, a sort of home for himself, even on the neutral ground of the common room in a tavern. Between the two rows of boxes ran a passage powdered with fine yellow sand, leading to a splendid mahogany counter inlaid with brass ornaments, on which shone rows of pewters and jugs with polished metal covers that gleamed like silver. Behind the counter was a narrow mirror in a wooden frame, and within reach of the hostess's hand a number of faucets at the end of pipes that led into as many barrels of ale and other liquids in the cellar. A few engravings of Hogarth's framed in black, and depicting the disadvantages of some vice or another, — not that of drunkenness, — completed the decoration of this part of the room, which was, as it were, the altar and sanctuary of the house.

Geordie went up to the counter, followed by his guest, who did not appear dazzled by the splendour of the place, and put to him, in a tone which the habit of flattering clients seemed to make more markedly obsequious than he intended, the usual question, "What will your honour take?"

"A post-chaise and four," answered the man, in the quietest, most careless way possible.

At this unexpected reply the owner of the Red Lion assumed a supremely disdainful attitude. He drew himself up, threw back his head and said: —

"Sir, I do not like practical jokes any more than practical jokers. You have already slapped me in a way that I do not care to characterise beyond saying that 'familiar' and 'indecent' do not seem to me too strong. Notwithstanding this discourteous action of yours, I have allowed you to enter this inn of the Red Lion, known, I venture to say, the world over; I have brought you to this counter where are sold refreshing, tonic, or spirituous drinks, as people may prefer; I ask you politely what your honour will take, and you answer nonsense. 'A post-chaise and four' is a reply which in no wise fits in with my question, and shows a formal intention on your part to insult me."

"Not so fast, Master Geordie. You talk too much. Do not get so heated. Just now you were merely crimson, now you have become purple, and you will soon turn blue. Be calm. I have never had the least intention of offending so respectable an individual as you appear to be. I am quite serious. As a matter of fact, I need a carriage, — landau, victoria, post-chaise, I don't care what it is, provided it is strong and runs

easily. With the carriage I need horses, and as I like to travel fast, I called for four, and of the best which have eaten oats in your stables. There is nothing very surprising in that."

The logic of this reasoning struck Master Geordie as plausible enough, although the dress and appearance of his customer still inspired him with a mistrust, which the latter no doubt suspected, for he plunged his hand in one of his pockets and drew out a fairly large bag, which he threw into the air. As it fell it gave out a metallic sound which, to the practised ear of Geordie, revealed the perfect harmony of guineas and sovereigns, without any discord of silver or copper money. The innkeeper, who until now had kept on his cap, took it off and twisted it in his hands somewhat shamefacedly, for he was rather troubled by the plain speech he had used to a man with so well-filled a purse; but who could have suspected that a traveller whose dress was of common stuff and vulgar cut was so well off?

"For how many of these round yellow coins do you propose to exchange one of your vehicles?" said the stranger, — whom I shall call Jack or John, for the purpose of my story; for, being an Englishman, he was

bound to be called by one or the other of these names, — as he spread a large number of coins in a semicircle on the table.

"I could sell you cheap the two-seated chaise, but it has a broken wheel and it would take some time to mend it; or the landau, if the rear spring were not broken," said the hotel-keeper, rubbing his nose with his finger, while with the other hand he held his elbow, — an attitude which at all times sculptors and painters have used to express perplexed meditation.

"Why," said Jack, "instead of these horrible, broken-down traps, do you not at once propose to let me have your olive-green double-seated travelling-carriage lined with Lincoln-cloth, and provided with such beautiful silk blinds?"

"My olive-green travelling-carriage, which cost me so much?" cried Geordie, terrified at the proposal. "What are you thinking of?"

"I am thinking of the carriage. The price is but a small matter. If I pay more for it than you did, you will no doubt consent to part with it?" And as he said these words, Jack, with a very lordly look, carelessly let fall by the other pieces a dozen guineas more, so as to almost close the circle of gold.

"He must be a nobleman in disguise," said the innkeeper to himself, as he nodded in acquiescence to the peremptory request of Jack. "No doubt on these terms I would agree to part with it," he continued aloud; "and when does your honour need the carriage?"

"At once. Tell the postilion to dress and have the horses put to as quickly as possible."

"Two minutes to bring out the carriage from the carriage-house, ten minutes to harness the horses and put them to, — that is twelve; three for Little John to put on his jacket, get into his boots and put a new lash to his whip; — that makes fifteen minutes, by which time you will be driving along at the best speed in the world."

"Fifteen minutes and not one more," said Jack, as he drew from his fob a big silver watch, "or for every minute you are late, I shall administer to your precious corporation one of those slaps which put you in such a temper."

In order to avoid this unpleasantness, Master Geordie hurried out and gave the necessary orders. Then he returned, and with his long habit of urging customers to drink, asked Jack whether he would not take some-

thing while the carriage was being got ready. "Would your honour like a glass of sherry, or port, or arrack punch?"

"Nothing at all, Master Geordie. Not that I doubt the excellence of your cellar and your skilfulness as a mixer of drinks."

"Do you happen to belong to a temperance society?" asked the innkeeper, astonished at such sobriety.

"I am not enough of a drunkard for that," answered Jack, laughing, "nor do I need to listen to Father Matthew's sermons, but I promised myself not to drink to-day."

"A papist, no doubt," murmured Geordie to himself, such a promise seeming to him even more imprudent than Jephthah's vow. "Well, I shall drink this glass to your health," added Geordie, very much grieved at the thought that his customer would not pledge him in return.

"I can watch a man drink without breaking my word," said Jack, "and indeed it is the more meritorious on my part, since I resist temptation; your wine looks so good."

"Real liquid ruby, sir, and what a bouquet! Springtime violets have not a more exquisite scent," said the

innkeeper, melting into poetry and putting his glass under Jack's nose.

Jack breathed in the aroma of the wine with a deep inspiration, followed by an expiration that sounded like a sigh. It seemed as though he would give way before a wine the merits of which he appreciated so thoroughly; so Geordie put the neck of the bottle over the edge of the other glass; but Jack was a man of character and firm will. He recovered himself at once and putting before the eyes of the innkeeper his watch, which pointed to fourteen and a half minutes, he outstretched his big hand, the shape of a mutton-ham, with an air of sarcastic threat.

"There are thirty seconds left," cried Geordie, trying to change the convex line of his paunch into a concave line, — a difficult and indeed impossible feat.

The watch was just about to the mark the fifteenth minute, and the pitiless Jack was balancing his hand to give it more swing, while Geordie was defending his corporation by crossing his arms in a more complicated way than chaste Venus, when fortunately the crack of Little John's whip and the sound of the olive-green carriage emerging from the yard put an end to the embarrassing and pathetic situation.

Jack let fall his hand and Geordie drew himself up again. "I said fifteen minutes," he exclaimed with the intoxication of satisfied punctuality.

"Your paunch has had a narrow escape of it," said Jack as he got into the carriage and sat down without the least hesitation upon the cloth cushions of Lincoln-green.

"Which way, sir?" asked the postilion.

"First, out of the village, and then I shall tell you the road you are to take," answered Jack, who no doubt did not care to let Master Geordie and the few idlers who had drawn together to witness the departure of the carriage know the real object of his trip.

After the village had been left behind, Little John, turning round, said to Jack, "Shall I take the London road, sir?"

"No, my lad," replied Jack; "drive along the shore until I tell you to stop."

Little John, somewhat astonished, drove in that direction, without, however, manifesting any surprise, for Master Jack, although facetious at times, had, it must be confessed, a very terrifying aspect. "No doubt," said Little John to himself, "it is a run-away match with some young lady, who, coming from a

house, will pretend to look at the sea and sketch the landscape, and then leap into the carriage. I rather like elopements, for lovers who feel that they have got parents or guardians at their heels generally pay very handsomely. And yet this fellow does not look like a lover."

They drove for some miles along the shore, on which the sea was breaking in regular waves and dragging down the pebbles polished by slow wear. Not far from the highest steep of the cliff which overlooks the ocean, Jack cried, "Stop!" without any apparent reason, for nowhere around could be seen a house, a farm, a manor, or a road.

Jack left the carriage and walked towards the cliff, which he ascended as easily as would a cat, a sailor, or a smuggler, helping himself by the smallest projections, clutching the clumps of fennel and broom which hung here and there from the rough chin of the rock. He soon reached the top, followed by the amazed glance of Little John, who had not supposed it possible to get there without a ladder or ropes.

When Jack reached the top, a man who was lying on his stomach in such a way as not to be seen from below, and who was looking through a telescope

towards the open sea, raised his head and said: "Ah! is that you, Jack? Is the carriage ready?"

"Yes, and with four horses."

"That is right. The vessel is in sight. I can tell it by the red-and-white pennant which is the signal agreed upon between us."

Even with the naked eye might be seen on the horizon, where the Channel opened out into the ocean, a small white sail like a feather fallen from a swan's wing upon the blue water.

"She has to beat to windward just now, but as soon as she can free her sheets, she will fly over the waters like a gull," continued the man lying down, still looking through the telescope. "The wind is southwest, — just what we want, and as good as if we had bought it from a witch."

Stretching himself out by his companion, Jack took the telescope and looked at the vessel, which was gradually drawing nearer, the hull being already visible. As soon as she freed her wind, great spaces of canvas fell from the yards like white clouds.

"Ah, there he is, showing more canvas in one minute than ten Spitalfield weavers could make in a year!" said Jack.

As soon as she felt the wind, the vessel heeled over, gracefully inclining her masts, as if in salute; then her sails shivered two or three times, and answering the helm, she resumed her upright position, while a double fringe of silvery foam flashed past her black sides.

"What a lovely craft!" cried Jack, carried away by enthusiasm. "She must reel off the knots in great fashion."

Apparently the crew of the ship did not share Jack's ideas as to her speed, for the fore-top-gallant sail was set and another jib showed beyond the two already swelling in the breeze.

"Look, Macgill," said Jack, handing the telescope to his companion; "they evidently don't want to lose any of the wind. With all that canvas set, the devil take me if she is not going fifteen knots!"

Impelled by a fresh breeze, the ship came on so rapidly that in a few minutes the telescope was no longer needed to make out the details.

"Why, they are mad! the captain must have drunk a ton of punch!" cried Jack and Macgill, on seeing the lower stunsails set, the ends of the booms dipping in the sea like the wings of a gull.

"If they keep on," said Macgill, "they will lift her from the water and make her fly in the air or turn her keel up. She is a fine brig. Everything hangs on; not a mast is bending, not a rope is giving," he went on admiringly.

"Never did a smuggler chased by a king's ship, never did a merchant vessel laden with gold and cochineal, harried by a corsair, fly at such speed. One would think their lives depended on it, and yet I cannot see another sail on the horizon."

"Captain Peppercull knows his business. If he is pressing his ship, it is because he is in a hurry or well paid. He would not run the risk for nothing of capsizing or of bringing the whole business down about his ears. He is not fond enough of water for that," said Jack, sententiously. "There is a good reason for our having been sent here and my being told to purchase a travelling-carriage from that accursed Geordie."

"Heaven forgive me, Jack! they are setting the sky-scrapers on every mast."

"There is not a sail now in the 'Lovely Jenny's' locker big enough to make a handkerchief out of. Every rag is set."

"Although, thank Heaven, I am not afraid of water,

externally, at least, I prefer at this moment to be on this rock rather than on Captain Peppercull's deck."

Feeling the weight of the increased canvas, the masts bent like bows, the cut-water disappeared almost entirely under the pressure of the wind, and a great shower of foam broke on the bows, like the shavings that rise from the hole of a plane vigorously driven.

"He will carry away his masts by the board," said Macgill, deeply interested.

Nothing gave way, however, and the ship, carried along like a whirlwind, shot up close to the cliff. Stripped in an instant of her sails, she stopped, showing her fine and delicate rigging. A boat left the side of the "Lovely Jenny" and in a few strokes brought to shore a man who appeared a prey to the liveliest impatience.

"Half an hour late!" he murmured as he jumped ashore, looking at his watch. "Where is the carriage?"

Jack, who with Macgill, had come down from the cliff, called the carriage up. When the new-comer was installed in it, Little John repeated his question, "Which way, your honour?"

"To London, and as fast as you can. Three guineas for yourself."

The carriage went off like lightning, the wheels blazing like those of Elijah's car. Alone with Macgill, Jack formulated this ingenious apothegm : —

"There goes a gentleman who is fond of travelling fast. It would have been a great pity if he had been born a tortoise."

II

LITTLE JOHN, carried away beyond all expression by the promise of a three-guinea tip, caused his whip to perform a series of cracks and explosions which resembled a musketry contest between two armies, for he was a virtuoso in this sort of music. The horses, exasperated by the cracking of the fusilade, and also by the lash of the whip, which in its vagabond arabesques caught them on the ears, galloped at full speed and rushed through space with mad ardour. The wheels turned so fast that they seemed to have no spokes; nothing could be seen of them but rapid flashes.

The stranger had ensconced himself in a corner of the carriage with the motionless resignation and the concentrated fury of a powerful will that meets natural and insurmountable obstacles, such as time and space. In the palm of his hand, stretched out on his knee, he held a watch, the hands of which he followed with a restless gaze. Then, glancing out of the window at

the sides of the road, he measured the speed with which the trees vanished past the narrow pane.

"The half-hour lost will soon be made up if the horses can keep up this pace for a little while longer," murmured the mysterious personage, with a sigh of satisfaction.

The man who was in such a hurry to reach London deserves to have his appearance described with a few strokes of the pen. He was young; his features were regular and cold, but marked with the stamp of reflection and of will. He did not appear to be more than twenty-six or twenty-seven years of age. The lower portion of his face, coloured by successive layers of tan, betokened numerous voyages or long sojourns in the East and the warm regions of the tropics, for the dark complexion was not his natural one. The brow, partially uncovered and flecked with short curls of very fine fair hair, had a satiny whiteness, and protected from the heat of the sun by the shade of the hat, it preserved all the brilliancy of Northern blood. Even after this examination, it would have been difficult to assign a particular rank or a distinct social position to the individual sitting on the Lincoln-green cloth cushions of Master Geordie's olive-green travelling-carriage.

Geordie, indeed, would unquestionably have uttered the most doleful lamentations on seeing the pace at which Little John was driving his horses and his favourite carriage.

The man was not a soldier. He had not the stiffness, the carriage of the head, and the square shoulders which make a son of Mars recognisable at a glance, even in civilian dress. Nor was he a clergyman. His face, though serious and thoughtful, had not the beatific expression and the sugary softness characteristic of churchmen. Nor was he a merchant. His white brow was not marked by any wrinkles full of figures and calculations as to the chances of a rise or fall in sugar. Nor was he a dandy. But it might be safely affirmed, on looking at him, that he was a perfect gentleman.

What was the urgent interest which made him gallop along the London road as if the salvation of the world depended on his not being a minute late? Was he running away from or pursuing any one? I cannot yet tell that.

The horses began to show signs of fatigue. The rubbing of the harness made the perspiration break out on them in flakes of white, foamy lather; their breasts

were covered with silvery foam like that of the sea-coursers in the triumphs of Neptune or Galatea. Long jets of smoke issued from their nostrils, and, carried away by the wind, mingled with the silvery vapour that rose from their heaving sides. The carriage rolled in a cloud, like the car of a classic divinity.

In spite of his great desire to earn the three guineas, Little John felt some scruple at driving his animals in this way, and the fear of bringing them back broken-winded to Master Geordie combated for a time his very natural desire to deserve the splendid tip. Then Little John was an Englishman, and his postilion's heart began to bleed as he saw Black, his favourite horse, breathless and covered with sweat. A French postilion would not have felt any such scruples. So, to quiet his own conscience, Little John rose somewhat in his saddle, made a half-turn towards the carriage, and said, resting his hand upon the quarter of the horse he rode: "Is it your lordship's intention to kill the horses and to pay for them?"

"Yes," replied the stranger.

"Very good," answered Little John; "your lordship's desire shall be fulfilled." And settling himself in his boots and his saddle, he struck his horse with

the handle of his whip. The animal reared, and the pain calling out the remains of his strength, he dashed forward, carrying along the remainder of the team. The desperate speed was kept up, thanks to an incessant application of blows, which would have wearied a less practised arm than Little John's.

The stranger's eye was still fixed upon his watch-dial; he paid no attention whatever to the rural landscape softly gilded by autumn, or to the pretty cottages peeping in all the simplicity of their morning dress through the trees, already losing their leaves, along the roadside, and showed himself insensible to all the graceful details of English nature. He assuredly cared very little for picturesqueness, at that time, at least, although he did not appear to belong to the thick-headed class of Philistines and *bourgeois*. He was engrossed by the one thought of reaching his destination.

Thanks to the additional impulse given to the speed of the horses by Little John, henceforth reassured as regarded all possibility of accidents, the eager traveller seemed to breathe more freely, his brow cleared, and he put his watch in his pocket.

"Come!" he said to himself, "I shall get there in time, in spite of the bad luck which, in all this busi-

ness, seems to have taken pleasure in upsetting my plans. It shall not be said that my will had to yield to human obstacles. And what a series of circumstances apparently combined on purpose to delay me! The vessel which brings the first letter in which I am informed of the matter, which interests me to such a degree as to make me leave India suddenly, is met near the Moldave Islands by Javanese pirates, who take and strip it; so it is only by the second mail that I learn what it is so important for me to know. I charter the fastest sailing-vessel which I can find in Calcutta, and a frightful gale makes me lose eight days in the straits of Bab-el-Mandeb. Half of my crew leave the Ganges carrying away the germs of black cholera, and die most unseasonably. In the Red Sea I find the plague, and the Isthmus of Suez barred by a series of quarantines. I write on a camel's hump a letter to worthy Macgill which must have reached him all in tatters, perfumed with vinegar and aromatic fumigations, tattooed with twenty colours like the skin of a Caribbean, and transmitted with respectful terror by the tongs of the health officers. At the risk of being shot down I evade quarantines, — for, amazing to relate, the plague was afraid of the cholera. Fortunately I

find idling along the shore not far from Alexandria worthy Captain Peppercull, a man without any prejudices, who is kind enough, in return for an immense sum, to take me on board his ship and carry me to England, carefully avoiding ports provided with lazarettos. Never have I been so nervous as on that accursed trip. I, who am usually so calm, was just like an empty-headed chit who has the vapours because her husband refuses to satisfy some unreasonable whim of hers. Well, I shall soon reach my journey's end; my letter, which must have arrived a day or two before me, has given them time to get everything ready. It is nine o'clock. In two hours more I shall be in London."

"Well, postilion," he said, going on with his monologue, as he lowered the window, "it seems to me that we are slackening our pace."

"My lord, unless we had the griffin spoken of in Scripture, or the car of fire of Elijah, we could not go any faster. I challenge any postilion, even were he paid six guineas, to get, no matter how hard he might whip them up, any greater speed out of the legs of four poor animals," majestically replied Little John, as he turned round.

However, as a slight concession to the extravagant desires of the traveller, Little John, who in his intercourse with society had acquired fine manners, cracked his whip two or three times; but, as he had foreseen, the stimulus was now useless, and the lash, though laid on to the withers of the horses, did not bring out a single shiver of impatience or pain. Soon the near leader, who was blowing like a blacksmith's bellows, was covered with lather, his coat grew rough, his head plunged forward, his hoofs lost the rhythm of the gallop; he staggered and leaned against his companion, then fell on his side. The equipage, going at full speed and unable to pull up at once, dragged the poor animal for quite a distance, rolling up with his body the dust of the road.

Little John, having stopped his horses, dragged at the fallen animal by the bridle and struck it energetically with the handle of his whip, believing that it had merely stumbled and fallen, but Black was never to carry travellers any more in this life. His flanks, wet as if laved in water of the sky and of the sea, heaved with a last convulsion; he rose up in a delirium of pain and made a few steps, dragging the carriage out of the straight line. He looked like one of those phan-

toms of wan, mutilated horses that rise from amid the heaps of bodies on abandoned battle-fields. Overcome by the ascendency and terror of approaching death which they felt with a wonderful instinct, the other horses, in spite of Little John's efforts, who dragged at their bits, followed the staggering steps of their poor comrade, a prey to the black intoxication of agony. At the very moment when the carriage, completely out of its course, was about to upset on the edge of the road, Black rolled to the ground as if invisible knives had hamstrung him; his great, wild eyes grew dim and were covered with a bluish film; a mass of foam filled his bloody nostrils, and he stretched out his legs, that stiffened like posts. It was all over with Black, a fine horse, worthy of a better fate.

The whole thing had occurred in less time than it takes to write it.

The stranger sprang quickly from the carriage, his face giving evidence of the most violent annoyance.

"This is the last straw," he said in an accent of concentrated fury, as he kicked Black's body. "That wretched brute lying on the ground like a piece of black paper might at least have lived some ten minutes longer. Come, be quick! I can see the post-house

yonder; make haste towards it." And the stranger helped Little John, who had got down, in a way that betokened his thorough familiarity with horses. He undid the buckles without any hesitation, and disentangled easily the complications of the harness tangled by the desperate efforts of poor Black. The postilion, at first scandalised by the little feeling which the stranger showed for the dead horse, felt sincere admiration, and bestowed upon him his esteem, a thing which he was most chary of.

"What a pity that you are a nobleman!" he said to the stranger. "You could have made a handsome living in my business. But perhaps it is better for us that you are a lord. Poor Black!" he went on as he took off the bridle, "who would have thought this morning that you were eating your last measure of oats? This is a sad life!" Such was Black's funeral eulogy. If the orator lacked eloquence, at least he did not want for feeling. A suspicious moisture showed in his eyes, and if he had not just in time carried to his eyes the worn cuff of his sleeve, a tear might perhaps have rolled between his cheek chapped by cold and his nose reddened by wine. Black's soul, if anything survives in animals, must have felt satisfied

and forgiven Little John for the blows he might have unjustly struck on the body it had once inhabited; for he did not lavish marks of tenderness, and he was the most stoical postilion that ever threw a leg across a saddle.

"Forward!" cried the stranger, sharply.

Little John again bestrode his horse, and the carriage rolled on, not so fast, but still at a pretty good rate.

The post-house was reached in a few moments and the stranger, having plunged his hand into his pocket, drew it out full of coins which he poured hastily into the horny hand of the postilion.

"That is for your tip and your horse."

Little John, perfectly amazed, began a sentence of thanks so complicated that he was compelled to give up the attempt to finish it, and called out abruptly in the midst of his splendid periods, as if seized with a sudden inspiration, to the stable-boy who was mooning around the carriage: —

"Hey, Smith! throw a pail of water on the wheels. They are heated and might take fire." Indeed a light smoke was rising from the axles and showed that Little John's fear was in no wise chimerical.

The lout, as he saw the axles smoking, said:

'Why! that is true. You must have driven rather fast to-day, Little John, for without offence to you, your carriage, and your horses, it is a long time since you have had hot axles. Is your gentleman generous?"

"As generous as the lord mayor on the day he is installed. But if he is liberal, he is also very short-tempered, so you had better make haste."

Smith rapidly hastened to plunge the pail into a stone trough, and lavishly poured water upon the axles. Meanwhile the hostlers, as prompt as they were clever, had harnessed four fresh, spirited and vigorous horses, the postilion was in his saddle, and a well mounted courier had gone on ahead to order relays. Jack, better versed in matters of the sea than in travelling by land, had neglected to take this precaution. Master Geordie's carriage started again as if carried away by hippogriffs.

As he led back his horses, Little John could not help stopping for a few minutes by the body of Black stretched out on the road.

"Alas!" said the postilion, "he was a willing horse, —that was the cause of his death. He pulled the whole team. You will never die like that, you idlers and sloths," he added, as he made his whip light upon the fat, dappled quarters of the survivors, which replied to

this morality by a few kicks. "There is no fear of your ever breaking down your nervous systems."

In order to be done with the interesting Little John and to follow as we please our stranger on his mad course, let us add that this fellow, honest and conscientious in his own way, gave Master Geordie half the sum which he had received from the stranger as the price of Black; less virtuous postilions might have kept two-thirds for themselves.

No remarkable incidents marked the other stages. Master Geordie's carriage rolled with steady velocity over the wonderful English roads, smooth as billiard tables and better kept than the roads in our royal parks. Already on the horizon showed the vast pall of smoke that always overhangs the city of London. The sight of it gave greater pleasure to the traveller than the most splendid Venetian azure.

"Oh! there is the smoke of that old devil's kettle," said the stranger, as he rubbed his hands with an air of deep satisfaction. "We are getting along."

The cottages and houses, at first scattered, were now in denser masses, streets began to run into the road, the high chimney-stacks of the works, like Egyptian obelisks, rose in the heavens and belched their

black smoke into the gray mist; the pointed spire of Trinity Church, the squat belfry of St. Olave's, the sombre tower of Saint Saviour's with its four finials, mingled with the forest of chimney-pots, over which they soared with the same superiority as a celestial thought soars above terrestrial things and interests. Farther on, behind this foreground with its irregular outline due to the angles of the buildings, showed vaguely, through the bluish mist which floated over the river and the complicated spars and rigging of the ships, the outline of the Tower of London and the gigantic dome of Saint Paul's, a British imitation of Saint Peter's at Rome, which, its contours softened by the mist, showed rather well on the horizon. Whether the prospect was familiar to him, or whether pre-occupation had killed curiosity, the stranger merely glanced at the objects seen in succession through the window, in order to assure himself of the distance he had traversed.

The carriage crossed Southwark Bridge, making as much noise with its wheels as the chariot on the Salmonean brazen bridge, then entered, on the other side of the river coming up towards the Strand, the labyrinth of narrow streets which border the Thames, and stopped at the end of one of those passages known

in London by the name of lanes, in the neighbourhood of Saint Margaret's Church.

The stranger drew out his watch and seemed relieved of a great weight, — the hands pointed to eleven. He had come sixty miles in three hours. He cast on Saint Margaret's a glance of satisfaction, then resolutely entered the narrow lane, made darker by the shadow of the church and the height of the houses.

Scarcely had he gone a few steps when a man seemed to emerge from the wall against which he stood, and from which he was scarcely distinguished, owing to the dark colour of his garments. He advanced towards the stranger.

"You have come from yonder for what you know?" he murmured as he passed near him.

"Yes, I am recommended by Macgill, Jack, and Captain Peppercull," replied the stranger in the same tone.

"Follow me. All is ready."

They walked to an ill-looking house whence they were no doubt being watched from within, for the door was at once noiselessly opened and closed.

While Master Geordie's olive-green travelling-carriage was travelling along the London road with the

terrific impetuosity we have described, the "Lovely Jenny" had not remained idle either. After having taken on board Macgill and Jack, she had continued on her way driven by a pretty breeze. Shakespeare's Cliff having been rounded, she had passed Deal and Dover, and following the line of white cliffs, had reached Ramsgate. Then, entering the river, she had stopped opposite Gravesend at nightfall, and had anchored behind the flotilla of Hull colliers, the black sails of which might have caused Theseus' father to die of grief. And there, with her debonair and peaceful look, she would have been taken for a respectable ship waiting for the tide to get up to London Bridge and land at the Custom House a most legitimate cargo. Yet her two lofty masts, her square yards, the fine lines of her hull, in which carrying power had been sacrificed to speed, gave to the "Lovely Jenny," in spite of her hypocritical appearance, a saucy, fly-away look which is not to be seen in vessels whose sole business is to carry molasses. On the other hand, however, no master could have shown more satisfactory papers than Captain Peppercull.

III

ALTHOUGH the house before which I have taken my reader is by no means of an engaging appearance, I hope he will not object to precede the stranger and his guide, and to enter it with me.

Externally it had nothing particularly repulsive, and looked very much like the other houses on the street. However, its narrow façade, compressed by the neighbouring buildings, which were wider, had an air of constraint, like a rascal who finds himself in good company. By the side of the ruddy, healthy faces of the neighbouring buildings, the brick of the walls, of an unhealthy yellow, gave the impression of the wan, unpleasant face of a debauchee. This house, for fear of squinting or being blind of one eye, had blinded itself altogether. Every window was closed, and in order to avoid reciprocity, nothing looked out of the house into the street. As is usual in London, a small area provided with a railing separated it from the

street. The railing, covered with the imperceptible coal dust which the English sky is constantly raining down, was as black as the balustrade around a tomb, and betokened on the part of the owner or the tenant utter carelessness of comfort or cleanliness, — that is, if the house were usually inhabited, for nothing in it revealed the presence of man. No smoke rose from the chimneys, and the brass bell-knob, covered with dust and verdigris, did not appear to have been touched for a long time; there was nothing living on the sleepy, gloomy, rain-washed walls.

If an attentive observer had studied the extraordinary aspect of the house, — the front of which, on account of the narrow breadth, admitted of only two windows and one room on each story, including the staircase, — he would have understood that the façade masked another edifice situated at some distance from the street and which was reached through this one; for the edges of the stone steps, worn and sunk in the centre, testified to more frequent traffic than the meanness of the place would have led one to suppose.

The door, in fact, opened into a long, dark, damp passageway through which fetid, icy-cold air, rarely renewed, circulated with difficulty. It was like the

atmosphere of a tomb, a cellar, or a dungeon. The walls of the narrow passage were polished about the height of a man by the continuous rubbing of greasy hands groping their way through the darkness. The floor was covered with a layer of mud, sticky in some places, hard in others, testifying to the coming and going of a great number of muddy feet. A few steps from the door the scanty light that filtered in through the dirty panes of the fan-light died away. One had to proceed then for a considerable space in the deepest darkness. It was probable that the passage was made through thick walls and could receive no light even by loopholes. Perhaps even in certain places it passed under-ground, judging from the water which made its way through the stones.

A man following this passage for the first time would very soon be thrown out of his reckoning by the numerous turns, and could not possibly make out in what direction he was proceeding. The stranger, preceded by the queer individual in the drab clothes, walked with a firm but prudent step, lifting up one foot only when he had got the other firmly placed; not that he had to fear any ambush or any trap, since the guide walked in front of him, but he felt that vague ap-

prehension inspired in the bravest of men by darkness and chill under a low vault between two narrow walls. Instinctively his hands sought under his cloak whether his two small pocket pistols were in their places.

At a great distance, in the obscurity, a few reddish rays began to show, indicating a lighted room, the beams filtering through the joints of an ill-closed door. The guide uttered a curious sound, evidently a signal agreed upon; the sound of bolts being drawn was heard within, and the door, opened slightly, suddenly shed into the dark passage a red rush of light.

Using my privilege as a novelist, I shall penetrate before the stranger into the strange place where he seemed expected; although in truth, it was impossible to guess what kind of relations could exist between this young man with the fine, noble face and the curious dwellers within that den.

It was a rather large room, in which the eye was first attracted by a chimneypiece of ancient form, in which burned in a grate a very bright fire of coal, the brilliant reflections of which illumined the room; for the wretched light coming in through the window, the lower panes of which were carefully whitened, and which opened upon one of those sombre wells that

are called yards in great cities, counted for nothing. The two window-panes left clean showed only awnings and roofs covered with tiles of an ugly red, chimney-pots, and black hoardings,—in a word, the whole of the interior wretchedness of a mean, ignoble building.

The walls, the lower part of which had been bared by the constant rubbing of shoulders, preserved in the upper portion some traces of a wash of a dark red tone like dried blood. On this background the customers of the place had, while waiting or while idle, engraved with a nail or a knife innumerable drawings and arabesques of the most fanciful description; the white lines stood out like the outlines on Etruscan vases, and gave proof of as pure and as primitive an art. The favourite theme of these unknown artists, the one most frequently reproduced amid the ornamental fantasies, was, it must be confessed, a gallows adorned with its fruits. Did this choice betray habitual preoccupation, or was it due to the pretty effect produced by the three uprights of the English gibbet united at the top by crossbeams forming a triangle, the picturesque silhouette of which attracted the artists? That is a difficult question to answer.

The drawings, though coarse, were remarkable at least for technical accuracy and fidelity. In spite of the barbarous drawing and the monstrous anatomical license indulged in, the movements and attitudes of the small figures represented as hung had a striking truthfulness which the most advanced art does not always attain. The running knots were well placed, and it was plain that they had been drawn by assiduous spectators of the Tyburn stage. These grotesque sketches, drawn with hideous joviality, made one laugh and tremble.

Numerous drawings, sections and elevations of Newgate, alternated with this pleasant subject; these, though lacking in architectural correctness, betrayed at least a thorough knowledge and a very clear remembrance of the place. Heads of smokers with the most bizarre profiles faced crowned lions and other apocalyptic beasts; vessels more fantastic than those of Della Bella rose and fell on impossible seas. All these things were drawn boldly, without much regard to the neighbouring sketch. Dates, monograms, and letters of the most amazing caligraphy complicated this hideous breviary on which the only words legible were "idleness," "vice," and "crime."

Yet the decoration of the room had not been wholly left to the fancy of chance artists; a more cultured art was evident in the coloured woodcuts representing the seven-branched candlestick, Susannah and the Elders, the portrait of George III, the Return of the Prodigal Son, the principal figures of boxing, the exploits of Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild, the Cid and the Bernardo del Carpio of the picaresque *romancero*, cock-fights, matches between famous bulldogs, Epsom and Newmarket races, etc.

The hot stifling atmosphere, full of miasma and coal smoke, tobacco and the strong smell of whiskey, floated through the room and proved that those who could put up with it had very strong olfactory nerves. Yet the three or four individuals who were in the place did not seem to experience any annoyance from it; on the contrary, their dull, vulgar faces had an expression of coarse comfort. They were dressed in black coats, satin vests and round hats; but before these clothes had reached them — having once perhaps belonged to Beau Brummel — they had evidently performed many a pilgrimage, and suffered many a misadventure. These tattered garments, of a cloth once lustrous and of a cut still elegant, and which in their degradation preserved

something of the shape which their first fashionable possessor had given to them, formed a sadly comical caricature, a mute satirical poem full of raillery and derision. One of the men, however, did not wear the wretched fashionable costume. A red woollen shirt, an oilskin coat, and a leather hat with a string for a chin-strap formed his dress, — that of a sailorman. A bold expression relieved the triviality and harshness of his features, and in his eyes, of a blue as clear and cold as that of the Polar ocean, shone a ray of intelligence. The others, indeed, seemed to address him somewhat deferentially, though he was leaning on the same table and helping himself from the same jug of half-and-half.

"Well, Saunders," said one of the men in black coats to the red-shirted sailor, "the time is approaching when the gentleman for whom we are to work is to come."

"Yes," shortly answered Saunders, who, while drinking, was busy kneading in the palm of his hand some black stuff pressed between two pieces of cloth.

"Do you know the gentleman, Saunders?" went on the speaker.

"No," replied Saunders, who plainly was fond of monosyllables.

"Ah!" added, by way of closing the conversation the black-coated man, as he leaned meditatively on the table.

Saunders rose, and going towards the fire, held out to the flame the dark substance, which he spread on the piece of linen cut in the shape of a mask.

"Do you propose to disguise yourself, and to go to the masked ball with Handsome Nancy?" went on the obstinate talker.

"I feel uncommonly like sticking this plaster on your face and shutting up your mouth with it, you unbearable talker," replied Saunders, with a growl as fierce as that of a white bear worried on an ice-floe by a whaleman's boat-hook. "Instead of questioning me, go and lift the trap and see if the others have arrived."

Noll went to one corner of the room, removed a trunk and a few packages, took hold of a ring in the floor, and with the help of his comrade Bob, raised the heavy trap-door. As it opened, a puff of cold, damp air blew into the room. Bob stiffening his arms, which, though thin and skinny, were very vigorous, supported the half-open trap-door. Kneeling on the edge of the opening, Noll plunged his head within the abyss. The bottom was so obscure that nothing could be made out,

yet the strength and freshness of the current of air forbade the supposition that this trap was merely an opening into a cellar. By listening attentively, one might discern in the distance the low lipping of water.

"I hear nothing," said Noll, after listening for a few moments; "I shall give the signal." And he uttered a modulated, guttural cry which sounded within the recesses of the subterranean place, though nothing answered save the echo.

"Never mind," said Saunders, "we don't need them yet, and it is no great fun to have to wait under that black vault. It will be dark early to-day," he continued mentally, looking towards the two bars through which one might have perceived the heavens if the fog, thicker and thicker, had not completely covered them. "All the better, the job will be so much the easier. Bob, is the dray ready, the one loaded with goods, which is to obstruct the end of the lane to prevent our being interrupted during our job?"

"Yes, Master Saunders, Cuddy is by his horses, and will make such a fine block that a ferret itself could not get into the lane. He is a clever fellow. To see him got up as he is, you would swear that he had never done anything in his life but drive drays, though

it is not his business," answered Bob, laughing and apparently delighted with his own joke. "You will be able to do your work as if you were in a wood or on a desert shore."

"You are too clever by half, Bob," answered Saunders; "you won't live to the day of your death. You look out."

While this was going on in the room adorned with the marvellous drawings which I have described, a narrow, light, fish-like yawl pulled by four oarsmen who seemed worked by mechanism, so mathematically synchronous were all their movements, was ascending the Thames without appearing to mind the roughness of the sea and the tidal eddies. The oars struck the water without a single splash, and opened and closed as easily as a pretty woman's fan. Although the fog, still thickening, made steering difficult and increased the chances of collision among the lines of ships that formed a floating city below London Bridge, the yawl slipped rapidly between the obstacles with incredible skill and speed. She seemed to carry at her bows, so great was her divining sensibility, the tentacles which make certain insects foresee objects, and which are, as it were, the eyes of the sense of touch.

When it had passed London Bridge, the enormous arches of which showed in great black masses against a gray sky, forming a Martyn-like effect which the English call Babylonian, and found itself in a less crowded reach, it flew along with increased speed. It was capable, apparently, of ascending a weir or a cascade like a trout.

Soon it passed, one after the other, Southwark and Blackfriars Bridges, and hugging the shore more closely, it ran past the Temple and the Temple Gardens; shaving Somerset House, it slipped under Waterloo Bridge by the arch nearest the bank, drew to the side, and disappeared within a low arch half masked by the projections of the buildings in the centre of which it was cut. A few laden barges were moored around, and the building, of brick and timber, so far as one could make out in the mist, looked like a warehouse.

The boat shot in under the low vault, which extended much farther than might have been supposed, as a sudden turn not far from the entrance cleverly concealed its depth. After a few minutes of careful rowing, the men unshipped their oars, and one of them, groping for a ring made fast to the wall, found

it, drew the painter through it, and made the boat fast. Then, one after another they leaped on to the lower step, half covered with water, of a stair which their knowledge of the place made them find at once in spite of the deep darkness in which they were plunged. An iron grating which one of the seamen opened, closed the passage at this spot.

The stair, after rising thirty steps, ended in a ceiling which the first man struck pretty hard with his head.

"The devil take it!" he said, "I did n't count right and missed one step as I came up. The consequence is I have got a bump on my forehead. Fortunately, my skull is hard."

"Well, Snuff, what has hit you? What are you cursing about there like an old papist woman spelling her beads, instead of knocking on the floor and giving the signal? Do you think it is fun for us behind you on this stair which is steeper than the ladder of a gibbet?"

"I shall knock on the ceiling and call out at the same time."

A low knock was soon heard through the passage followed by a prolonged yell.

"Who is that below the floor?" said Saunders, starting at the well-known sound and stamping with his heel on the trap. "Quiet, you old mole, I am coming," he added, turning to his own use the speech of Hamlet to the shadow, for Saunders had recently seen at Drury Lane Theatre this play of old Shakespeare's, which had made a deep impression on his coarse but poetic nature.

The trap-door was opened, and, thrown back on its hinges, gave passage out of the damp abyss to four fellows who, if they did not look quite respectable, bore at least on their weather-beaten faces a significantly astute and bold expression indicative of energetic qualities applied perhaps to other than lawful ends.

"Is there any gin or whiskey left?" cried the first man who set foot on the floor, and who at once proceeded to the table to ascertain whether a drop of the precious liquors still remained.

"Oh!" said the next one, "when Noll and Bob are seated opposite each other for fifteen minutes with a bottle between them, the poor little thing soon dies of consumption."

"Don't worry, Snuff," answered Noll, drawing a full bottle from a corner. "Beelzebub himself would

lick his lips if he tasted this. It is pure vitriol, liquid fire, undiluted by anything soft. I wonder if you are like me. The longer I live, the weaker I think gin."

"That is the way of life, old fellow. The longer you go, the more you lose your illusions. We have all believed that gin was strong. What fools we are when we are young," moaned Snuff, as he poured himself out a bumper of blue ruin.

The conversation had got so far when the stranger and his guide, having first made the signal agreed upon, entered the room. The stranger cast a quick glance at the worthy rascals, who involuntarily looked down, except Saunders, whose face showed fiercer among the others. There was in him the stuff of a criminal; the others were capable of misdemeanours only; he was a pirate; the others nothing more than thieves. The stranger, with the quickness of a cultivated mind, guessed that the least ignoble in the company was Saunders. With a single glance he made him the chief, and it was to him that he addressed himself.

"Has everything been prepared according to the plan agreed upon?" said the stranger, in a calm, imperative tone.

"Yes, my lord, we merely await your good pleasure," answered Saunders, politely, but with no servility.

"Good. The time to act has come."

"All right," said Noll to Bob; "go and tell Cuddy to enter the lane with his dray."

Bob went out, after having tried to polish up his hairless beaver, for he said a man must always endeavour to look as if he were a man of the world. Saunders arranged his pitch mask in the palm of his huge hand and prepared to follow him.

"The man with whom I shall be chatting when I enter the lane is the one you have to carry off," said the stranger; "but above all, be neither violent nor brutal to him."

"You may rest assured of that, my lord. The gentleman will be handled as delicately as a box marked 'fragile,'" replied Noll with all a smuggler's conceit.

The men went out one after another, to avoid suspicion, and loafed in the most natural fashion into the deserted lane. The stranger went on by himself towards Saint Margaret's Church.

IV

USING my privilege as a novelist, I shall pass without any transition from the sombre den I have just described to an elegant residence in the West End. This digression, far from taking us away from our story, brings us back to it. The scene is very different, but it is not because I have sought a contrast.

Miss Annabel Vyvyan's maid had just put the finishing touches to her bridal dress, and, by way of final precaution, was fixing with another pin, passed through the thick braid of brown hair on Annabel's head, a long veil of English point-lace which fell in transparent folds over the white wedding-dress. Mary and Susan, the two other maids, when they saw the veil at last adjusted, took two candles that were burning on the table, and held them up so that their young mistress might conveniently see herself in the mirror; for although it was nearly eleven in the forenoon, scarcely did a faint ray of light penetrate through the

windows and curtains. A yellow, thick, choking fog, such as is not unusual in London, weighed down upon the city and prolonged through the day the shadows of night.

The head which, illumined by the sudden radiance of light, was reflected as if surrounded by an aureole upon the dark background of the mirror, was of a beauty in no wise inferior to the purest creations of Greek art. The most striking thing about that divine face was the milky, marble-like, dazzling, luminous whiteness, in which the features showed with the transparency and delicacy of Oriental alabaster. Although it is a habit of young brides about to proceed to the altar to blush a rosy red, Annabel's cheeks were scarcely coloured by a faint, rosy flush like that which colours the heart of a white rose. The blue blood of aristocracy veined her delicate flesh, a hothouse flower which neither wind nor rain had ever fallen upon, a fine pulp composed of exquisite juices and pure elements in which plebeian rusticity had no share whatever. Freedom from material cares, the refinements of hereditary luxury, the perfect comfort of life, the living in vast apartments and in country-seats with great shady parks traversed by running waters, joined

to the purity of the race, often bring beauty to unimaginable perfection. The living marble in which are carved these beautiful bodies has no rival in the world for its brilliancy, its fineness, and the transparency of the grain. The quarries of the human Paros and Pentelicus are found in ancient Albion, so called rather on account of its women than of its cliffs. Annabel was the fairest maid in that swans' nest anchored in mid-ocean.

Two delicate black eyebrows met at the root of the nose, — which a slight aquiline inflection made more noble than a Greek nose, without depriving it of any portion of its exquisite form, — and crowned two eyes of an intense, warm brown, the pupils of which floated on a crystal limpidly blue. Lips of a bright red showed like a carnation in her pallor, which became all the more marked and striking on that account. Down Annabel's lovely cheeks fell two soft, silky lustrous curls which she twisted around her finger. In giving this last touch to her toilet she showed a hand of charming shape, narrow, somewhat long, with slender fingers ending in polished nails brilliant as jade, and of irreproachable aristocratic purity. Such hands, that drive to despair the new-made rich, are the product

of centuries of elegant life and are transmitted like diamonds from generation to generation.

Apparently, Annabel was satisfied with her looks, for a faint smile flitted over her serious face, and turning towards Fanny she said in a voice as harmonious as music: "Fanny, you have surpassed yourself to-day. I really do not look badly."

"You are not difficult to dress, Miss — for I may still call you so. You become your gowns so well."

"You flatterer! What o'clock is it?"

"Just eleven," answered Fanny, after having glanced at a clock inlaid with mother-of-pearl and standing upon a pedestal.

"Eleven o'clock already, and my aunt Lady Eleanor Braybrooke has not arrived!"

"I think," replied Fanny, "that I hear a carriage stopping at the door. It must be Lady Eleanor."

A thunder of raps sounded in the lower part of the house as Fanny ended, betokening the arrival of an important personage. A few minutes later a powdered, silk-stockinged footman announced, as he raised the portière: —

"Lady Eleanor Braybrooke."

A majestic, stiff-looking woman, of that age politely

called a certain age, entered the room with such automatic stiffness that her thick silk dress did not undulate in the least. She seemed to be moved by internal wheels and to be advancing on little brass casters like the dolls which a concealed mechanism drives around a table. The corselet which moulded her charms, developed by the stoutness of her fourth youth, would have warded off a lance-thrust as surely as Milanese mail, so well reinforced was it with whalebone, steel, and other compressive materials. How in the world the lady had managed to get herself into that sheath is a mystery of her toilet which I shall respect, but she must have undergone a pressure of forty atmospheres to attain the result.

Her broad, square face was diapered with all the colours of an eruption. Her cheeks flamed, her nose was almost like a live coal, her very brow was red. Her incandescent face was framed in by hair of a British auburn fiercely curled, and resembling filaments of vegetable silks rather than human hair. Her expression would have been almost coarse but for two eyes of a hard, cold steel-gray which relieved the commonplaceness by their disdainful and imperative look. That glance of hers stamped her as a great

lady, a woman in high life, in spite of the heaviness of her shape and the brilliancy of her complexion.

Lady Eleanor Braybrooke was a widow, and acted as chaperon to her niece, Miss Annabel Vyvyan, who when quite young had been left an orphan and absolute mistress of a large fortune. In the important ceremony which was about to take place, Lady Eleanor Braybrooke was to act the part of the mother.

Miss Annabel was about to be married, although not very romantically, no obstacle having come in the way, to a charming young fellow, Sir Benedict Arundel, who loved her and whom she had been in love with for nearly a year. He was young and handsome, noble and rich; the match was entirely suitable in every respect, since the bride possessed precisely the same qualities.

"Look, aunt! what a horrid fog!" said Miss Annabel, turning her lovely eyes to the window.

"At the beginning of November that is not astonishing," replied Lady Eleanor.

"No doubt. But I should have liked for this day, the loveliest in my life, an azure sky, a bright sun, the perfumes of flowers and the songs of birds."

"My dear, if you have a room with good hangings,

plenty of tapers, a bright fire in the grate, a bottle of scent and an Érard piano you can dispense with all these things. I never trouble about the weather, for my own part."

"You are always practical, aunt."

"And you always poetic, my niece."

"I wish nature shared our feelings more. The sadness of the heavens weighs down on my happy soul."

"My dear child, if God at your request were suddenly to remove the fog, the splendour of the sunshine might perhaps strike some suffering heart as ironical."

"That is true, aunt, but I cannot help being a little nervous this morning."

"Well, Sir Benedict Arundel will soon relieve you of that," answered Lady Eleanor Braybrooke, with the equivocal, wrinkled smile people of her age are too fond of indulging in.

The sound of a carriage was heard under the window, and very soon Sir Benedict Arundel appeared.

He was dressed quietly and plainly, with that exquisite perfection characteristic of the perfect gentleman, which never draws the eye, and the secret of which the English alone possess. He had avoided the

almost insurmountable ridicule of wedding garments, and yet his costume was such as became the solemnity of the occasion. In accordance with the custom of the day, he wore neither beard, moustache, nor royal, nor any of the ornaments which bristle upon the faces of men on the continent. His smooth, polished face was surrounded by dark-brown whiskers, carefully curled, which an artist fond of the picturesque might have thought too regular, but which would certainly have obtained the approval of the late Brummel and Count d'Orsay. He had the Antinoüs features, somewhat long and cold, which the great families of England often exhibit, and his head looked like a copy of that of some Greek god made by Westmacott or Chantrey. It was impossible to imagine a better-matched pair.

The cloud on Annabel's brow vanished at the sight of her betrothed; the blue eyes of Benedict were azure enough for any heaven. A pure joy illumined the charming face of the young girl, as she held out her hand to Benedict, who kissed it. Lady Eleanor Braybrooke's gray eyes sparkled at the picture, that no doubt recalled a similar scene in which she had played a part, but so long ago that it certainly required an excellent memory to remember it.

"That is just the way we were," she whispered to herself, "dear Sir George Alan Braybrooke and I, some twenty years ago or so."

The "or so" was rather enigmatical, but Lady Eleanor did not care to state more accurately, even to herself, any date which might have given the exact number of her years. That mental comparison would have occurred to no one but the good lady, for when young she had not even the devil's beauty, and Sir George Alan Braybrooke, tall, thin, stiff, bony, with a square chin, a nose like Wellington's and a square-cut mouth, had never resembled, even in the days when he was a lover, the elegant Benedict Arundel.

"Come, children, it is time to go," went on Lady Eleanor. "The chaplain has no doubt already put on his surplice, and the guests are arriving in numbers." She entered her carriage with Annabel, and Benedict took a seat in his own with William Bawtry, a friend of his.

The coachmen, powdered and beribboned, wearing huge bouquets, their scarlet faces made more crimson still by numerous libations to the health of the future pair and their descendants, took up the reins with an incomparably grand air, clucked their tongues, touched

up their horses, and the procession started for the church. The sun had made useless efforts to dispel the fog brought down by the west wind upon the city of London, and its pale, rayless orb scarcely indicated its place in the heavens by a livid spot liker the face of a sick man than the brilliant star of day. The gas lamps, still lighted, gave out beams almost immediately swallowed up by the fog. At a short distance the various objects, showing faint, assumed strange, fantastic forms. The carriages loomed like leviathans and behemoths, the passers-by like giant phantoms; the sombre walls of the buildings assumed the appearance of Babel, and it took all the skill of the coachmen not to lose their way through the opaque air in which sonorous vibrations were deadened and which seemed to have covered the streets with a pall of clouds.

The church where the wedding was to take place was Saint Margaret's, a building in the Norman-Gothic style, with a square tower, great buttresses, and a huge quatrefoiled window. The building was lugubrious to look at, with its walls black as ebony; the mouldings, washed by the rain, always appeared to be covered with snow. It rose in the centre of a graveyard without any verdure and strewn with tombs, the shape of which,

faintly recalling that of a body, had a sinister and horrible look. A railing, which the coal-dust given out by the hundred thousand chimneys of London made more sooty than the air-holes of hell, surrounded this God's acre, made more gloomy still by the near bustle of the city. The high tower rose with its crown of invisible finials in the fog and seemed to have been cut off. The porch, sombre and smoky like an oven, opened its wide gates, looking like the mouth of an orc or some other huge animal breathing vapour out of its nostrils. The fog which filled the great nave seemed to be the breath of the architectural monster. Unquestionably, without being superstitious, a young couple might very well, at the sight of this lugubrious church, entertain some doubts as to their future happiness. One shuddered unavoidably on entering this church darker than Erebus, and within the depths of which shone no beam of light, no star of hope. Certainly it would have been unjust to ask of an old and wretched Protestant church in London, at the end of September on a foggy day, the bright and happy look of an antique temple with its white columns showing against the blue of an Athenian sky ; but the truth is that that morning Saint Margaret's looked more like a

sepulchral vault prepared for the reception of the dead than a church in which a loving couple was to be married.

"Well," said Sir William Bawtry to his friend Sir Benedict Arundel in their carriage, "so it is true that you are going to be married at twenty-four, in the flower of your age, when so long a life of pleasure and enjoyment was still open to you!"

"At twenty-four, — you are right, dear William. Marriage is a piece of folly which one should not commit save when young."

"I am quite of your opinion, and besides, Annabel justifies your prompt resolution; but when we were together at Cambridge no one would have ventured to predict that you would be the first of our jolly band to be caught in the trap of wedlock."

While Sir William Bawtry and Sir Benedict Arundel were thus chatting as they drove to the Church of Saint Margaret, a man who had left the neighbouring street slipped under the sombre porch and stood against the wall between two pillars like the stone statue of a saint. He wore a broad-brimmed hat pulled down over his eyes, and the end of his travelling-cloak thrown over his shoulder concealed the lower part of his face.

What was visible of his features appeared to be tanned by the sun of other climes.

After a few moments of dreamy motionlessness he freed one of his hands from the folds of his cloak, and pulling out a large flat watch, he said to himself: "This is the hour, they will soon come." And he put back the watch into his pocket. Of whom were these words, murmured with a strange accent, spoken?

The carriages, turning the corner of the street, now arrived before the porch of the church. Then the man, whom my readers have already recognized as the eager traveller, threw back his cloak and seemed to take a firmer stand, like one approaching a supreme crisis.

The steps of the carriage were lowered. Annabel, leaning slightly on Benedict's hand, was about to descend and enter the porch, when the stranger, having bowed deeply to the bride, touched Arundel's arm. The latter turned around abruptly, astonished at such an interruption at such a time, for, as he was turning his back to the church, he had not seen the man with the mantle coming forward.

"Sidney!" cried Benedict, on recovering from his first amazement.

"In person," replied gravely the man thus addressed.

"And I, who accused you of indifference! And so you have come from India to be present at my wedding! That is why you did not reply to my letters, — you wanted to give me the pleasure of a surprise."

"Benedict, I have a single word to say to you, and it is for that I have come."

"Well, you can tell me presently. I shall introduce you to my wife, — and indeed, you are already presented to her. Lady Arundel, Sir Arthur Sidney."

"No, I must speak to you at once and alone, if but for a moment."

There was something so firm in Sidney's look and so imperious an accent in his voice that Benedict hesitatingly let fall Annabel's hand and drew towards his friend.

"Your ladyship will be kind enough to pardon my insisting," said Sidney, seizing Benedict's arm with a smile of affected grace. "I have but a word to say to him." And he drew Benedict to the corner of the church at the entrance to the little street that leads up one side of it.

Annabel had sat down by her aunt, Lady Eleanor Braybrooke, who grumbled at this untimely interruption.

"Most improper, to turn up from India in that way, to intercept a bridegroom at the very threshold of the church! A nice time he has chosen to talk his nonsense!"

"Sir Arthur Sidney is an eccentric man who never does anything like any one else," replied Annabel. "Benedict has often told me how queer he is."

"But a well-bred man ought not to have any eccentric friends," replied Lady Braybrooke, in the most majestically disdainful tone.

Annabel smiled at her aunt's proud indignation.

"I should not," continued the dowager, whose face had turned crimson, — "I should not have allowed Sir George Alan Braybrooke to leave me at the moment of leading me to the altar, were it for the empire of the world. But the word which Mr. Sidney had to say seems to be pretty long."

Lady Braybrooke's reflection had already occurred to Annabel, for she put her head, crowned with virginal flowers, out of the window of the carriage to see if Benedict had returned. But no one yet appeared at the corner of the church, the most distant point to which the fog allowed the glance to reach. The position was becoming singularly ridiculous.

Helped by Sir William Bawtry, Annabel and Lady Braybrooke got out of the carriage and took shelter under the porch. Sir William offered to notify Benedict and Sidney of the impropriety of such a conversation prolonged so long.

The guests, already astonished, surrounded Miss Vyvyan, and advised her to enter the nave; the passers-by were beginning to look with surprise at the beautiful girl dressed in white, a bride without a groom, standing under the dark porch.

As she entered the church, Annabel felt on her shoulders, scarcely covered by the thin lace veil, a damp, cloister-like chill; she seemed to be enveloped forever in the cold of the convent and the sepulchre. She had a presentiment that she was passing from light into shadow, from bustle into silence, from life into death. She thought she felt breaking within her the spring of her life.

Sir William Bawtry returned pale, thunder-struck, not knowing which way to look. He had traversed in all its length the lane entered by Benedict and Sidney, had been round the church and had examined every spot, but Benedict and Sidney had disappeared.

V

AT about the same time when Annabel was finishing dressing, in another London house another young girl was also putting on, but slowly and as if regretfully, her white wedding-robes.

She was beautiful and extremely pale; faint violet lines showed upon her eyelids and gave proof of tears recently shed, the traces of which the corner of her handkerchief, dipped in fresh water, had not caused to disappear completely. Her drawn mouth tried to smile, but the corners of her lips turned up with an effort only to draw down again with pain. Short, painful breathing made her bosom heave, and when the maid approached to place upon her brow the wreath of orange flowers, a slight flush coloured her pale cheeks.

Miss Edith Harley looked more like a victim being prepared for sacrifice than a maiden going to the altar to freely pledge her love and faith. Yet Edith was not the victim of stern parents: neither a barbarous father nor an ill-tempered mother compelled her choice. Her

lovely, delicate hand was not being forcibly put into the gouty hand of an obscene and abominable old man. The man whom she was about to marry, Lord de Volmerange, was young, handsome, charming, and of an excellent family; in a word, all that the most practical parents and the most romantic girl could wish. Edith had even appeared to accept willingly the attentions of Count de Volmerange, and in the interviews which had preceded their betrothal, her eyes had often turned towards the young lord with an indefinable expression of melancholy and love; though usually his presence threw her into a state of agitation and anxiety visible only to an observer, and which did not agree with certain glances full of fire, strange in a young girl otherwise apparently so modest.

Did she hate or did she love de Volmerange? That was a mystery difficult to solve. If she did not love him, why did she marry him? If she did love him, why was she so pale, weeping, and cast down? An only child, worshipped by her father and mother, she had but to say a word to have the marriage broken off. Why should she not say it? Any man of her choice would have been accepted by Lord Harley and his wife, for, having no other desire than to make their

daughter happy, no prejudices of caste could have induced them to force her inclinations; they would have accepted a poet even.

When Edith's maids had done their work, which was delayed by the uneasiness and the preoccupation of the girl, who unwillingly yielded herself up to them, she signed that she was tired and wished to remain alone for a few moments.

As soon as the women had withdrawn, a slight knock, which might have been mistaken for the sound made behind the hangings by the insect vulgarly called the death beetle, as it strikes the wall with its antennæ to call its female, sounded in the corner of the room in a place where was a condemned door. On hearing the sound, evidently a signal, Edith started as if she had not been forewarned. A look of deep anxiety darkened her face, and she rose abruptly from the arm-chair in which she had thrown herself. A second knock sounded a little louder, though yet low.

Presently the young girl staggered towards the door, pressing her hands to her heart, the beating of which stifled her.

A third, sharp, imperious knock, in which annoyance prevailed over the fear of being heard by any one else

than Edith, testified to the impatience of the mysterious visitor.

Poor Edith moved away a small piece of furniture which half masked the false door, and drew the bolts with a trembling hand. A key, working from outside, sounded in the lock, and the leaf, half opened and at once closed, gave passage to a man who was not Count de Volmerange.

The man who so singularly and so secretly entered the room of a maiden who in a few hours was to be another's wife, had a face which at first it would have been difficult to characterise. His slightly olive complexion with its mat tone brought out two singularly mobile eyes, the expression of which was purposely deadened. His mouth was well shaped, but the thin, closely compressed lips seemed to preserve a secret, and the lower lip, frequently bitten, betokened repressed impulses and necessary restraint accepted by the will, but not by the blood. The nose, too thin in outline, too pointed in spite of its good shape, gave an astute expression to the rest of the face. It was a head in which no defect could be found, which one was inclined to say was handsome, but which yet produced an unaccountably repellent effect. It attracted

and repelled at one and the same time by a sort of dangerous grace, of troublous charm. The colours which shine brightly upon a bird's wing assume, on the spotted skin of a serpent, without losing any of their brilliancy, an evil, venomous tint which is beautiful but terrifying. The man to whom Miss Edith had just opened a door closed to every one had the beauty of the viper and the grace of the tiger. It would have been difficult to tell his age. His smooth brow had none of the wrinkles, none of the marks made by years on a human face; he might have been a mere youth but for his icy coldness and lack of spontaneity, signs of dissimulation long practised. His was not a face, it was a mask.

His dress was black and neutral brown, quietly elegant, not drawing the eye by any detail and leaving no impression on the memory.

There was a moment of painful silence. Edith, embarrassed, seemed to wait until the stranger should speak, but the latter did not appear disposed to save her the trouble. His attitude was respectful rather by habit than from real deference, and he cast straight at the girl a masterful glance.

"So you persist," said Edith, making an effort, "in wishing me to be Count de Volmerange's wife?"

"I shall certainly not change my intention now. The wedding is more necessary than ever."

"And yet you know that it is impossible."

"It is so absolutely impossible that in two hours it will have taken place."

"Listen, Xavier, there is still time. Do not force me to act a lie before God and man. I can throw myself at my parents' feet, confess everything, and obtain forgiveness for myself — and you. My crime is great, but their indulgence is boundless."

"You shall not do it. I would give you the lie."

"Even if I took all the blame on myself?"

"I should maintain that I was always a stranger to you."

"But I have proofs that can confound you," cried Edith indignantly, as she hastened to a small box, the concealed bottom of which she opened.

"You think so, do you," answered Xavier, with an ironical smile playing over his thin lips.

With a convulsive hand Edith rummaged violently in the box, from which she withdrew some papers that, by the way they were folded, seemed to be letters. She opened one and cast it down. It was blank; a second and a third were the same; then she dropped

the parcel and her arms fell by her side. Every trace of writing had disappeared; the letters were now simply plain sheets of paper.

"Happily *your* ink, Miss Edith, was intended to last longer than mine. The precious characters traced by your lovely hand are quite visible on the letters which you condescended to write to me."

"Xavier, there is in all this a riddle which I cannot read. I am young and beautiful; you have told me so in more ways than did the serpent to Eve. The one fault I have committed was for your sake. You alone have the right to consider me innocent. My fortune is great, my family bears one of the most honoured names in England and has never been disgraced by any one but me. This unsuspected stain you can wash away with a word. You have no other resources than those of your education, which makes you worthy of a rank far higher than that which you now occupy. If you marry me, a new world will open before you: you shall pass from darkness into light, your life will broaden out; you will be able to use in a great sphere the talents you possess. What has been a dream will become a reasonable wish; politics and diplomacy have nothing too high for you."

As Edith spoke, Xavier's pale face flushed, his eyes, which he no longer deadened, flashed; he followed in his mind the young girl into the regions which she showed him as if to tempt him and to obtain from ambition what she had failed to get from love. Once indeed he seized Edith's hand, and grasped it firmly; but the impulse was of short duration, the brilliancy of his eyes died out, over his face spread again the gloomy look which concealed the emotions of his soul, and he went on in an icy tone: —

"You shall marry Count de Volmerange."

"Your refusal, which I fail to understand, can have but one cause. In that case there is no remedy for my misfortune. Perhaps you have already a wife in France."

"No," replied Xavier, in a strange tone, "neither in France nor elsewhere. I am a bachelor."

Edith, who until then had supplicated him, rose and with the most dignified and majestic air said to the young man: "It is not through love for you that I have so earnestly entreated you. You fascinated me, but I have never loved you. You acted on me as a philter or a poison might do, and I am no more guilty than if a potion had robbed me of my senses. I have

never loved you, thank God! I am proud of it. It is my one consolation. My eyes, blinded for one moment, were quickly opened. When I heard the true eloquence of the heart, when I saw the heaven's light shining in a true man's look, I saw at once that I had been the prey and the sport of a demon, and I loved Count de Volmerange as much as I hated you, I esteemed him as highly as I despised you. Yes, I love him madly, with all the strength of my heart and soul," added Miss Edith Harley, insisting cruelly, as she saw Xavier's pale face turning green; "and I desired to spare him the shame of marrying a girl whom you have soiled. But I shall tell him everything; he will forgive me and avenge me. And now, sir, go, or I shall ring and have you thrown out of the window!" she cried in a tone which betokened the revolt of her aristocratic blood.

As she said these words, she advanced one step, and Xavier, as if blasted by the blaze of indignation that flashed from Edith's eyes, staggered back through the door, which closed violently upon him. The last glance of the wretch was like that of the serpent which feels the lion's claw in its back. Edith shot the bolts, put back the furniture, and the sound of

Xavier's steps died away on the stairs as Lord and Lady Harley entered the room.

Anger had brought back the colour of life to Edith's cheeks, and the fire of indignation had concealed every trace of tears in her burning eyes. The calm of a supreme resolve smoothed her brow. So Lady Harley, as she drew her daughter to her heart, said to her caressingly : —

"My dear Edith, I am delighted to see that you have overcome the sadness in which you were plunged. I was afraid this marriage was repugnant to you, and that a vain fear of breaking your word at the last moment alone induced you to carry it out. I would not have a single worldly consideration compromise the happiness of your life, and although Lord Harley finds in Count de Volmerange every quality which one could desire in a son-in-law, he has come with me to tell you not to bind yourself by a marriage which has so greatly troubled and distressed you. When I was about to wed your dear father, I felt nothing of the kind. The deepest confidence and the most celestial serenity, the calmest and most penetrating joy, filled my soul. These must be the feelings of a girl when she is about to be married to him whom

she is to accompany to the tomb and to meet in the next life."

"Mother," answered Edith, kissing Lady Harley, "and you, dearest and most honoured father, I thank you with deep gratitude for what you have just said. I cannot tell you how deeply I am touched by these proofs of your love. Your anxiety is unfounded. Pray be reassured; your choice is mine. Like you, I think Count de Volmerange high-bred, full of the noblest and most generous feelings, of perfect elegance and thorough grace. I firmly believe that if a man can make any woman on earth happy, he is the one." But Edith could not quite restrain a sigh, which disagreed with the words she uttered and seemed to indicate regret rather than hope.

"I love Count de Volmerange," she went on; "I can say that before you, my dear parents, at the moment of going to the altar. The tears I have shed, the sadness in which I have indulged, are no more than the melancholy fit of a nervous child, whose only real grief is that of leaving you."

"So much the better for us, dear Edith. I feared that a secret aversion inspired your tears and your sighs."

"Kiss me, father," said the girl, holding out her brow to Lord Harley, who drew her to his breast. Then she took her mother's hand and bent over it with deep emotion. A few stifled sobs escaped her, but when she raised her face she had resumed her calm expression.

Count de Volmerange was announced.

He was a young fellow of twenty-five or twenty-six, whose handsome face at once attracted by its curious charm. He was born at Chandernagore, of a French father and an Indian mother, and united in himself the qualities of the two races. His eyes, of the purest blue, were shaded by very long black lashes and surmounted by ebony brows clearly marked on a forehead of mat pallor. This contrast imparted a singular grace to his face. The blue glance, showing between the sombre fringes, had a sad, soft tone which the strength of the neighbouring tones prevented from being feminine. When a lively emotion moved him, his eyes, made brighter by the warm tints of the eyelids, seemed to be illumined, and turned from sapphire to turquoise. This discord in tone, agreeable though it was, and which a colourist painter would have studied with love, imparted a fatal and supernatural look to his handsome

face. Some of the dreamy, sinister angels of Albert Dürer have that same glance, vast as the heaven, deep as the sea, in which every form of melancholy seems to have melted into a drop of azure water. Although peace of the soul, frankness and kindness breathed in that face, no artist, having to paint happiness, would have taken it for a model.

Count de Volmerange was tall, and although slight, was endowed with uncommon strength. Though his figure was aristocratically elegant, the breadth of his chest and the muscles of his arms, which showed under the cloth of his sleeves, betokened athletic vigour. His robust nature, improved by the breeding and the perfect style of a gentleman, was possessed of extreme grace, the grace of strength.

The party left for the church, which happened to be that very Church of Saint Margaret in Palace Yard under the porch of which Miss Annabel Vyvyan, pale as an alabaster statue upon a tomb, was awaiting her bridegroom. Edith's veil touched Annabel's shoulder as she passed. As for Volmerange, perfectly happy, he did not even cast a glance at the unhappy girl waiting on the threshold of the church and trying to look into the fog; yet two fates had just passed each other.

Annabel, thinking of no one but Benedict, paid not the least attention to this incident. A prey to her anxiety, embarrassed by her peculiar situation, she did not notice either Edith or Volmerange. No shudder warned them.

Edith and Volmerange entered the dark church, and the ceremony took place to the sound of the gusts of wind which moaned through the shadowy naves and made the doors slam. The fog was turning into rain, and great drops, driven by the wind, struck against the yellow panes of the huge Protestant windows; a pale light, dimmed constantly by the blasts of the tempest, lighted with its sinister gleams the wedding couple, the priest, and the spectators. The surplice looked like a shroud, and the clergyman as livid as a spectre, or a necromancer performing a spell. The sacred gestures were like cabalistic signs, and the kneeling pair seemed rather to be praying on a tomb than to be bending happy and joyous, to receive the marriage blessing. Near the door in the distance was seen a white shape surrounded by black coats, who seemed to be kept to the threshold of the church by an infernal power, like an unhappy soul driven from Paradise by an angel. A feeling of overwhelming sadness filled the spectators; a

vague presentiment of misfortune beat with bat-like wings upon every brow; an icy, penetrating cold which chilled the very marrow within the bones, a cold like that of a cellar, a sepulchre, or a prison, made the guests shudder, and added to the painful impression. The least superstitious, in spite of their incredulity, could not help thinking to themselves: "This is not a very auspicious wedding. If it turns out well, we shall have to confess that happiness has sometimes very sad omens."

The only one who did not feel any of these external impressions was Volmerange. He worshipped Edith, and if the day on which he received her hand in his had been filled with lightning and thunder, clouds and water-spouts, it would have appeared to him pure and serene. What matter the winds of heaven and the fogs of earth, when a man bears sunshine in his heart and the heavens in his soul?

As the couple left the church, a meanly dressed man of humble mien, who might have been taken for a poor beggar or a solicitor speculating upon the happiness which leads a man to make others happy, held out to Count de Volmerange a sealed envelope apparently containing a few papers, — a petition, no doubt,

with certificates in support of it. Volmerange took the envelope with a careless hand and put it in his pocket without looking at the man who proffered it. Edith, at the sight of him, shuddered but said nothing.

It was written above that no marriage should be happily celebrated that day in the Church of Saint Margaret.

Sir Benedict Arundel had disappeared. And towards the middle of the night in the nuptial chamber of Volmerange and Edith, a deep, painful moan had sounded in the silence of the house. Some of the servants had heard it, but no one had dared to seek to penetrate, without being called, into the mysteries of the marriage chamber. Only, the next morning, as no sound was heard in the room, as no ring of the bell was heard and it was already past noon, they ventured to open the door.

The room was empty.

VI

LADY ELEANOR BRAYBROOKE, raging and exasperated, looked apoplectic enough to fill her heirs and collaterals with hope had they seen her at that moment. She was unable to keep still, and formed the greatest contrast to the pallor and motionlessness of Annabel. She was like a red-hot coal by the side of a snowflake, and the wonder was that the nearness of her blazing face did not make Annabel's white one melt.

"I cannot understand it," said Sir William Bawtry. "I cannot even form the most absurd conjecture about this disappearance."

"I can think of a reason," answered the choleric Lady Braybrooke. "Benedict Arundel is the lowest of wretches. But we cannot remain here forever, stuck like statues. Let us return to your home, my niece."

She took Annabel's arm and led her to the carriage.

When Annabel, until then sunk in mute stupor, found herself alone with her aunt, she gave way to a

hysterical fit, her lovely features were contracted, violent sobs broke out, and if abundant tears had not flowed from her eyes, she would have died of grief.

"The loss of fifty thousand Arundels is not worth one of those pearls which flow from your eyes, my darling," said Lady Eleanor, as she tried to calm Miss Vyvyan. "I told you that a well-bred man would not leave his bride at the door of the church to speak to a friend. Sir George Alan Braybrooke would never have indulged in such a piece of rudeness. Who can this Sidney be? The brother, I suppose, of some creature whom that wretch Arundel had seduced, and who was waiting in some neighbouring tavern with her baby in her arms."

"Sidney has no sister, aunt; Sir Benedict told me so several times," replied Annabel to Lady Braybrooke; "so your supposition is unfounded. Besides, Sir Benedict Arundel is incapable —"

"Oh, nonsense! you girls always have excuses for these handsome-whiskered gentlemen, who look at the moon when they talk to you of an evening. Your Benedict was poetical and a poet. I have always detested such people, — one never knows which way to take them. They have unintelligible ways of look-

ing at things, and a sort of reversed logic which makes them do the very thing that no one expects them to do. They imagine absurd happiness, and fancy they are suffering from chimerical misfortunes. What is needed in marriage is a practical mind. Sir George Alan Braybrooke — "

"But, aunt, suppose he has been the victim of a plot. Suppose he has fallen into a trap — "

"Nonsense! a plot in London in broad daylight, a few steps from a file of carriages and a whole crowd of footmen and policemen!"

"If Benedict has not returned, it is because he is dead," replied Annabel, stifling a sigh in her handkerchief, which she had wetted with her tears.

For a few moments the girl was overwhelmed by convulsive sobs.

"Come, come!" said Lady Eleanor, troubled by Annabel's despair. "Because a bridegroom disappears for some more or less mysterious reason, it does not follow that he is no longer on this earth."

"Oh, I am sure, aunt, I shall never see him again. I feel a presentiment that I shall not. He is forever lost to me."

"Oh, nonsense! What do you mean by presenti-

ments? I have never had any. That may do in Scotland, the country of second sight, but in London, in the West End, people do not foresee the future."

"But the church had such a gloomy look; I shuddered as I crossed the threshold."

"That is simply the effect of its age and of coal, a mere Gothic phantasmagoria. If you had chosen the new church at Hanover Square, imitated from the Parthenon and painted white, in which all the best people are married, you would not have felt that prophetic effect, and your future would nevertheless have been the same."

"Your reasoning is cruel, aunt, but I feel that a brutal hand has just blotted on the book of fate the page on which his future life and mine were written."

"But, instead of seeking supernatural explanations, I must say, even if I am to pain you, that there are more plausible motives, — love for another —"

"How can you think so, aunt? In that case, I should prefer that he should be dead. Sir Benedict Arundel is incapable of falsehood and treason. His lips speak what his heart thinks, and his heart is in accord with his eyes. Besides, is it possible to deceive? Then why should he have done it? Has

he not a great name, is he not as rich as I am, and as young?"

"And as handsome, you may add. The two of you formed a lovely couple," added Lady Eleanor Braybrooke, with a sigh; for she could not help acknowledging the accuracy of Annabel's reasoning, and her anger had begun to yield to genuine anxiety. She understood that what she had taken for an impertinence might well be a misfortune. Her complexion, hitherto violet, now became purple, then crimson, and finally red, which was comparatively pale for her.

In the course of a few minutes the carriage drew up at the door, and Miss Annabel Vyvyan walked up alone, sad and despairing, the stairs which an hour before she had descended with joy in her heart, a smile on her lips, and the tip of her white glove in the hand of her well-beloved.

The surprise of her maids was extreme to see her return thus, but Lady Braybrooke's remarks soon made them aware of what had happened, and although, with the reserve of English servants, they did not permit themselves to ask any questions or to say anything about the misfortune which had just befallen their young mistress, it was plain that in the inferior sphere

in which they moved, they shared her great and well-grounded grief; and they showed it by the change in their faces and the careful manner in which they walked about the room for fear of disturbing her. Miss Annabel had thrown herself, half fainting, on a sofa opposite the mirror in which but a moment since she had looked at herself in her wedding-dress. If mirrors, in spite of their inconstancy, had the least feeling for the objects which they reflect without preserving them, this one would have been astonished and touched at reflecting, so pale, so wan, and so despairing, the face that but a few moments before had shone in the depths of its burnished steel so fair, so fresh, so radiant with happiness and hope.

Alas! the pretty tea roses had lost their lovely tints, and scarcely did the lips preserve a rosy touch almost vanished. The living beauty had become a dead beauty, and the statue animated with joy had turned into an angel of melancholy weeping over a tomb.

The wedding bouquet and ornaments, of which Annabel's distracted glance caught a glimpse in the mirror, in their white freshness and their virginal brilliancy, appeared to her an odious irony, a cruel jeer.

"Undress me," she said to her maids. "Of what use are these wretched ornaments? I am no longer a bride, but a widow. Give me a black dress."

"There," cried Lady Eleanor, "is another romantic idea. To wear black, — that is absurd. A brown dress would suffice, for, after all, you are not married. You will compromise yourself, Annabel, and it may hurt you later. Benedict is not the only husband in the world."

"So far as I am concerned, he is the only one."

"You talk like a love-sick girl. No love is irreparable, everything can be made up, and one man is as good as another, — you may believe my long experience," said Lady Eleanor, swelling out as, thanks to the flattering sound of the word "experience" in such matters, she risked the epithet "old" in order to give more fulness to her periods and more authority to her maxim.

On his part, poor William Bawtry, not knowing what to think of so strange an occurrence, was traversing the streets for the twentieth time with the stupid obstinacy which is the result of incomprehensibility. He hoped to find Sir Benedict by dint of going and coming. He entered rapidly the few shops in the lane,

and made the worthy dealers in West Indian goods, the hospitable proprietors of oyster-houses and taverns, repeat till they were tired that they had seen no one pass by resembling the gentleman whose description he gave. The police, on being questioned, said they had seen no passer-by, no group of people at the time when Sir Arundel disappeared; that besides, the fog, so thick at that moment, prevented any one seeing more than three or four yards away; nevertheless, they had heard no sound, no cries, no scuffling, had not noticed the faintest signs of a struggle, and the gentleman whom Sir William was looking for had no doubt gone away of his own accord.

Where could he be sought for in so vast a city as London, without any clue to guide investigators, who, besides, would have to stop at the inviolable threshold of an English home, in case the retreat which concealed him could have been suspected? Nevertheless, Sir William Bawtry went to the police headquarters, where he received a promise that the matter would be inquired into; and he sent through the city some fifty detectives who walked up and down all sorts of unlikely streets, and returned that evening, their shoes visibly worn and with mud up to their necks, without, however, having

found anything that could lead to the discovery of Benedict or Sidney.

While walking towards Miss Annabel Vyvyan's house, for the state of agitation in which he was, made him prefer walking to driving, Sir William Bawtry, in a monologue which the usual phlegm of the English did not prevent his breaking in upon with gestures that would have seemed eccentric if any one in London ever looked at anybody else, asked himself a number of insoluble questions about the event that had happened that morning. "What the devil!" said Sir William to himself. "Although we do deserve to a certain extent the reputation of eccentricity which we enjoy on the continent, my friend Benedict's act goes far beyond the bounds of eccentricity. To drop on the threshold of the church the handsomest girl in the three kingdoms is a savage and abominable act. Benedict was unquestionably madly in love with Miss Annabel. It was no caprice. For the past year he had seen her almost every day, so he had not taken fire unexpectedly. Miss Annabel's soul is as lovely as her body; she is as beautiful within as without. What can have so suddenly turned Benedict against her? Did he at the last moment discover some hidden vice, some concealed offence in her? Yet

in driving to church with me, he seemed radiant with happiness, caressing dreams of the future, and not having the slightest intention of running away. He seemed to be ready to bow very gracefully to the yoke of marriage, and no one could have foreseen that he would so abruptly lay back his ears and bolt like a shy colt. I suppose that at the moment of giving it up, bachelor life appeared to him in the most attractive colours; or Sidney has told him about Miss Annabel one of those terrible things which burn like a red-hot iron and cut like an axe. But what could he have to say about that pure, transparent life spent in a house of glass, every hour of which can be accounted for, and in which slander and calumny could not find the shadow of a pretext? What cool extravagance can Sidney have proposed to him? — a trip to the Arctic, a tiger or black-panther hunt in his Java domains? That would be madness, and Benedict is not mad; and unless Sidney has taken him away with him and put him in his pocket, I can make nothing of it."

At this moment a happy thought occurred to Sir William Bawtry.

"Suppose I were to go to Sidney's house in Pall Mall, the one he lived in before he left for India."

The windows of the house were closed and everything indicated that no one had lived there for a long time. William lifted the knocker, and a servant opened, after having made him wait a long time. The servant, who had come from the farthest recesses of the mansion, testified at the sight of Sir William Bawtry a surprise which proved how rare the appearance of a visitor was in this deserted home.

"Is Sir Arthur Sidney at home just now?" asked Sir William Bawtry, at haphazard.

"Yes, sir, I think so."

"In that case, show me up to him. Here is my card," said Sir William, as he entered.

"Oh! he is not here, but in Calcutta, in Blue Elephant Street, number 25. This is the time at which he was accustomed to come home. Sir Arthur Sidney has been living in India for two years past."

"And has he not returned?"

"Not that I am aware of, sir," answered the servant, still edging Sir William towards the door.

"And yet I have just seen him in a street near Saint Margaret's."

"You must have been deceived by some likeness, sir, for if Sir Arthur were in London, he would have

notified us of his arrival, and no doubt would have come to his own home," answered the servant in a tone of ironical politeness, and closing in Sir William Bawtry's face, whom he evidently took for a swindler, the leaf of the door, —the handle of which he had not let go during the conversation.

Resuming his way, Sir William said to himself: "Either Sidney is really not in London, or that rascal has been drilled to say what he does. And yet I clearly recognised Arthur, and Benedict spoke to him and called him by name. If Benedict had debts, I might suppose it was a sheriff's officer, dressed up like Sir Arthur, to carry him off to a sponging-house. Well, I may perhaps now find him at Miss Annabel's, explaining his remarkable conduct in the most natural fashion possible."

But Sir Benedict was not at his bride's house, and Lady Braybrooke, seeing the girl's dreadful despair, tried to prove to her that nothing was more natural for a man than to disappear just as he was about to be married, and that Sir George Alan Braybrooke, who was the best bred of men, would have been equally facetious.

If Benedict himself did not appear, he might at least

have written; but there was no letter, no note, nothing to explain his strange conduct.

The investigations of the police were fruitless; the fate of Benedict Arundel remained sunk in the most mysterious secrecy. It was difficult to believe that he had been murdered, since Sidney, who had been brought up at Harrow with Benedict, was his intimate friend and had no motive of enmity towards him. As for his being carried off and imprisoned, what could be the purpose, what could be the motive? It could not be jealousy of a rejected lover, for Sidney had never seen Miss Annabel, and there could be no rivalry between him and Benedict.

As evening came on, the poor bride returned to her maiden chamber, the threshold of which she thought that morning she had crossed for the last time. Her maids undressed her and laid her like a dead body in the pretty white nest over which had fluttered so many happy dreams, waving their rosy wings over the ivory brow of the young girl. She remained in the same position in which she had been put, her head sunk in her hair, which flowed like the water from a river urn, her pale face resting on her arm. She might have been thought dead but that, from time to time,

a tear rolled over her pale cheeks like a pearl over marble.

"Good-bye, my dear child," said Lady Eleanor Braybrooke, seeing that her niece remained obstinately mute. "Keep up your heart."

A faint gesture of hopelessness made Annabel's shoulders move, for she was absolutely convinced that Benedict, not having returned at once, would never reappear again. Not for one moment had she believed in treachery on his part. She felt that she was beloved by him, whether absent or present, in this life or in the next. She had the unshakable faith of first love. Thus she wept all night silently, until the heavy sleep of morning weighed down upon her reddened eyelids; but her dreams were as sad as her thoughts, for time and again tears escaped from her closed eyes. And thus was spent the wedding night of the young girl who should have been Lady Arundel.

Lord Harley and his wife, overcome with grief, were on their part making equal efforts to discover their lost daughter and son-in-law.

The bed seemed not to have been slept in, the tapers had burned quietly down to the frills. On the table a crushed paper, burned at the flame of one of

the tapers, had preserved its shape, represented by black ashes. On the floor lay the envelope, addressed to the Count de Volmerange, without a stamp, and evidently addressed in a disguised hand. Lord Harley studied intently that shadow of a letter which the least breath caused to flutter, and which contained perhaps the secret of the irritating mystery of the flight of Edith and Volmerange. He tried in vain to make out on the fine calcined pellicle the few traces of letters which the fire had not caused to disappear, but he might just as well have attempted to decipher hieroglyphs, and worn hieroglyphs at that. The burned paper gave no information, and yet it was evident that it had played an important and decisive part on that fatal night; the very care taken to destroy it testified to its value.

The great glass door opening on the terrace had been opened and a careful inspection of the sanded walks showed a few faint footprints of a small, well-shaped woman's-foot, for the toe and the heel alone had marked the damp ground. Others, larger and deeper, mixed with these. All ended at the terrace which rose at the end of the garden above the street. That way Edith and Volmerange must have gone.

From the terrace to the ground was a height of some six or seven feet. How had they managed to get down, and how could this amazing flight be explained? A young married couple to leave their nuptial chamber on their wedding night as if they were culprits, without a word of explanation, plunging a father and mother in the most dreadful despair, was something terrible.

Lady Harley recalled Edith's sad and preoccupied looks on the days preceding the marriage, and supposed that she was the victim of some disappointed love. But Edith had sworn that her heart was free, and that Volmerange was the husband of her choice. To explain the matter by a rape or a crime was no explanation, for there were no prints of footsteps from the terrace to the glass door, the road which malefactors would have necessarily taken. The ground, wetted by the night tempest, would have preserved these traces as faithfully as the footprints of Edith and Volmerange.

A bit of muslin caught on one of the iron spikes placed upon the coping of the walls pointed out the way by which the young wife had sprung into the street. Unfortunately the pavement, muddy and

covered with pools of water, had preserved no trace of the fugitives. The storm had caused the streets to be deserted early, and no one had seen anything.

"Perhaps," said Lord Harley, "they have gone to their Twickenham estate. And yet Volmerange did say that he could not understand the foolishness of burying one's happiness within a postchaise, and turning postilions into confidants of true love. Still, let us send a messenger to Twickenham."

The Count and the Countess had not appeared there, and the housekeeper had received no orders from them.

The reply plunged Lord and Lady Harley into the deepest grief. During the time the messenger had been gone, they had managed to prove to themselves that their daughter had gone to Twickenham; they had clung to that vain hope so desperately that when it escaped them like a tuft of fennel, they rolled into an abyss of misery, and thought they had lost their daughter for the second time.

The most careful search failed to bring about any result, and the disappearance of the married pair remained shrouded in mystery. The dark Church of Saint Margaret had indeed realised the sad presenti-

ments inspired by its austere and funereal aspect, and justified Lady Braybrooke's preference for the new church in Hanover Square as far as weddings went. This time the good lady was not wrong when she maintained that Gothic churches were good only to be buried in.

VII

"WELL, Sidney, what is the important matter you have come to tell me about?" said Benedict Arundel to his friend, as he stepped into the narrow lane which the shadow of the church and the fog together made as black as a corridor of hell.

"It will not take long," answered Sidney, as he took Benedict by the arm and brought him nearly opposite the house described in the preceding chapter, as if he were not yet sufficiently far from the wedding company to tell his secret.

Just at this moment a dray drawn by four of those huge horses to be seen only in London, and which, with their gray coats and their colossal form, look like young elephants, entered the lane, which it filled almost completely from one end to the other. The driver, who was at the head of the horses, was the aforesaid ingenious Cuddy. The dray, thus driven, formed a moving barricade which completely stopped up the

street. It prevented Benedict from retracing his steps and also people from coming to his help. On account of the enormous load, the dray proceeded very slowly, and had not yet passed the third or fourth house in the street. Saunders was crawling along the wall near Benedict, and in his hand, hanging at his side, was the mask to which Noll had made anacreontic allusions, supposing it intended for Nancy's pretty face. As for Noll, who aimed at being a man of the world, — a pretension which in his opinion was justified by a silver pin set with imitation turquoises representing the harp of Erin and stuck in a black satin rag, and especially by a pair of gloves of indescribable colour which might have been white at some remote time, and through the finger-ends of which passed red knuckles and blue nails, — Noll was gracefully dawdling, chewing an unlighted cigar and caressing the bone of his stork-like leg with a small switch used for beating clothes, and which he carried as if it were a riding-whip. Bob, true to his character, was spelling out on the sign of a low drinking-shop the pompous and very deceitful list of French wines and foreign liquors. He preferred this sort of literature to all the poetry on earth; Shakespeare and Milton were in his eyes only wretched

scribblers by the side of the letter-painter who had written this superb list, much more lyrical than Pindar's odes, — a Greek whom Bob would have assuredly despised because he wrote a stanza beginning thus:

"Water, in truth, is very good."

When Sidney, followed by Benedict, passed near Saunders, he winked at him almost imperceptibly. Saunders understood and drew near Benedict. Noll let fall his stick and bent, pretending to pick it up, and Bob, who had got so far as "Cognac, Arrack, Rum, and Tafia," dragged himself away from his intoxicating reading. Cuddy left his horses, which quietly stopped, and drew nearer the group. At the same moment Benedict felt slapped in his face and spread over his features a thick, warm, heavy mask which at once deprived him of sight, breathing, and speech; a strong arm was pressed against his loins like an iron bar; broad bony hands, with fingers like crabs' claws, caught his legs and raised him from the ground. It was all done in a flash, and Benedict, whose arms were held by human fetters so that he could not get rid of his mask, felt himself carried off towards some unknown place by a mysterious force, as in those horrible dreams in which Smarra carries you off upon its monstrous back.

The door of the deserted house opened as if by magic, and the band entered the dark passage, followed by Sir Arthur Sidney. When they had got sufficiently far into the narrow corridor, so that the light coming from the street had completely vanished, Saunders wisely bethought himself that it was not necessary to stifle the gentleman, and cleverly pulled off the pitch mask which covered Benedict's face. He was just swooning away, and the mad efforts he had made to free himself had greatly diminished. He was tortured by inexpressible anxiety, the blood was surging in his temples, his breast heaved as if breathing were an impossibility, his ears sang violently, and his blinded eyes saw passing before them fantastic blue, green, and red lights.

Assuredly the atmosphere in that dark, fetid, icy-cold passage would at any other time have turned Benedict sick; but never was an Alpine breeze, untainted by any human breath and laden with all the scent of flowery solitudes, inspired by more eager lungs than that almost mephitic air. That breath of tainted air was life to Benedict. The immense relief he felt was manifested by a deep sigh and a prolonged "Thank God!"

"It looks," said Noll, to himself, "as if the gentleman began to feel the need of putting his nose out of the window, and although Bob maintains there is nothing better than a drink of whiskey, I think the gentleman would have preferred a breath of air."

Benedict, now realizing his situation, attempted to resist, but eight vigorous arms drove him into the room I have described, and which the crew of the yawl, who had now returned to their boat by the subterranean passage, had left empty. The door was closed upon him, and the key turned sharply in the lock. Still overcome by weakness, Benedict sank upon a box and leaned in an attitude of despair on the table covered with glasses and jugs, the remains of the orgy Noll and Saunders had shared in.

Strange was the transition, stranger still the turn in his fate. But a few minutes since, Sir Benedict Arundel was sitting in a comfortable carriage opposite a lovely girl, a fair angel that had come from heaven for him, surrounded by his friends and his acquaintances, in the midst of a brilliant, aristocratic company, so high placed that it seemed impossible for misfortune to touch any of its members. And yet, by an unheard-of treachery, a perfidious trick, he was now a prisoner in a

horrible den where no doubt a dreadful death awaited him.

He gazed with lack-lustre eye at the red glow of the coal fire that was slowly dying out, at the blood-red walls reeking with crime and vice, on which gallows, portraits of murderers and robbers, scenes of blood and debauch, scratched in white outlines, mingled in a sinister saraband with obscene, enigmatical, or threatening inscriptions, in the intermittent light of the fire.

The very elegance of Benedict's dress made the contrast still more striking. His perfumed, clean, white glove resting upon the coarse wooden table cut by knives and shining with grease, produced a most painful impression. Such a man as Benedict could be in such a place only as the result of a mysterious and wicked plot.

Somewhat recovered from the shock of the sudden blow, Benedict asked himself what could be the object of this strange sequestration. Had Sir Arthur Sidney wished to deliver him over to evil-doers, to assassins perhaps? Was it an eccentric way of punishing him for not awaiting his arrival? Had Sir Arthur planned this kidnapping, or, being himself a powerless spectator, had he hastened for help in the unequal struggle? Sir

Benedict passed from conjecture to conjecture without being able to fathom the mystery.

Then he thought with despair of the mortal anxiety and the painful situation of Miss Annabel on not seeing return the man she had chosen for her husband, and whose disappearance would remain inexplicable. The thought maddened him. He cursed Sidney, and raged round the room with the mechanical obstinacy of a wild beast seeking an outlet. Several times he tried to break down the door, but it was firm on its rusty old hinges, and Benedict's fiercest blows had no effect upon the thick boards. The window, placed at an inaccessible height, was further guarded with flat iron bars with serrated edges placed so closely together that a sylph could not have slipped between them without tearing its wings.

In the hope of being heard in some of the neighbouring houses, the queer angles of whose roofs showed faintly through the upper panes, Sir Benedict shouted with all his might. In order to make the sound carry farther, he endeavoured to imitate the calls of sailors in a gale of wind and of mountaineers who signal to each other from the two sides of a precipice separated by a torrent, but the room was as mute as if it had been

padded; Benedict's voice awoke no echo, and came back to him as it does on high summits where the rarefied air stills the vibrations of words.

Maddened, Benedict passed from cries to howls, and a bloody foam rose to his lips. Then, weary and ashamed of his useless attempts, he let himself fall upon the bench. The coals, almost entirely consumed, gave out an occasional flicker only; a tiny violet flame meandered, ready to vanish, over the heaps of ashes. Night, which had fallen, made the window dark, and formidable shadows grew in the corner of the room, in which the eye of terror could easily have perceived the motions of monstrous swarming forms.

Sir Benedict was unquestionably a brave man, but to the fury and despair of being separated from Annabel was added the instinct of personal preservation very properly awaking in him. His strange and dark adventure was well calculated to inspire apprehension in the most courageous mind. Imprisoned, alone, unarmed, defenceless, in a padded, mute chamber, the door of which was perhaps about to give passage to murderers, Benedict fell into the deepest discouragement. Another still more terrible fear assailed him.

Suppose the murderers should not come! Suppose he were to be abandoned in that hideous room, a wretched oubliette used by ignoble assassins! The thought of dying there of thirst and hunger like a mad dog, far from light and men, presented itself so vividly to his mind that a cold sweat broke out on his forehead. He would have welcomed an assassin standing on the threshold of the open door as a delivering angel, for it would have been swift death without torture, instead of a hideous agony more frightful even than that of Ugolino, for the latter had at least his seven sons to eat.

He strode up and down the room, seeking an issue, sounding the walls, but there was no other door than that which he had vainly tried to break down; or if there were, it was so skilfully masked that he could not discover it. Besides, even if he had found it out, of what use would it have been? It was no doubt closed by some secret or complicated lock, the key of which would certainly have been taken away.

In the paroxysms of his despair Benedict cursed God and man. He shook his fist at the dark ceiling, for lack of the vault of heaven, and stamped violently upon the floor, unable to strike more directly the face of

step-mother Cybele. The floor gave out a dull, hollow sound, for Benedict happened to stamp right over the trap I have spoken of.

Great joy filled his heart as he heard his steps sounding over the void. The hope of escape immediately gave him back his energy and his coolness. He knelt down, and feeling the floor with his hands, searched in every direction for the ring, knob, or spring that would cause the trap to fly open. He soon found the ring, and with a mighty effort succeeded in lifting up the heavy door.

The air of the underground passage struck his face, and the abyss showed vaguely before him, more sombre than obscurity and darker than night. Whither led the opening? Was it the commencement of an underground passage, or a well into which the bodies of victims were thrown? Was it the receptacle where a company of Burkers kept the bodies of their victims? Would he stumble over heaped-up bones, or upon the laden tables of a clandestine morgue? Perhaps some eccentric physician wished to indulge in the anatomical amusement of dissecting a gentleman's body and using the scalpel upon the fibres of an aristocrat, and his purveyors, considering Benedict a suitable subject, had

seized him to sell him for a sufficient number of guineas to this dilettante doctor.

But it was impossible to admit that Sidney, his childhood's friend, his chum at Harrow, was playing a part in this awful conspiracy, and the most horrible part of all, that of the tame ox which leads the wild bull to the arena or the slaughter-house.

By putting out his arm Benedict felt the top step of a stair, and like all brave men he preferred to meet death rather than await it in stupid gloom. He slipped through the opening of the trap, which he had been unable to throw back on account of its weight, and put out his arm to support the trap-door, though it trembled and almost gave way. Then, thinking that he had gone down enough steps for the trap not to smash his skull as it closed, he bent down his head and took away his hand. The trap-door, left to itself, fell with a lugubrious sound like the cover of a coffin which falls upon the dead. The obscure entrance to the subterranean passage made the sound still more sinister and lamentable. Brave though Benedict was, he felt chilled to the very marrow, and said to himself: "If a man can hear, when his body is sewn up in the shroud, the sound of the earth falling upon the coffin cannot be

more dreadful and lugubrious. Perhaps I have buried myself alive and this black hole is to be my tomb."

He continued, nevertheless, to descend the steps, going down carefully, his hands outstretched.

"I only hope that this passage has an opening, even if it does lead me into a company of bandits, or into a sabbath of witches," said poor Benedict, almost regretting the blood-red chamber.

In the deep darkness there was no light, not even a livid one, no star, not even a bloody one; no ray of light in the interstices of the planks; nothing but deep, cold, dreadful night. The unfortunate young man seemed to have passed from the first to the second room of his tomb. The wind, blowing under the damp vault, moaned like a human voice, a sound with which nature on stormy nights seems to deplore unknown losses; vague lamentations, stifled sighs, sobs apparently escaping from a breaking heart, the howls of victims pressed by the murderer's knee, the organ of the tempest played for the wan auditor, groping in the shadow, its whole symphony of sadness and terror.

As he descended, the steps became damp and slippery, and a fine mist driven by the wind struck his

face. The low lipping of water could be heard through the gusts, and the spume of a wave, breaking higher up than the others, wetted his feet. He came to the conclusion that the passageway led to the Thames, and as he might have rivalled Lord Byron as a swimmer, he believed his escape certain. Indeed nothing could be easier for a swimmer such as he was than to reach the opening of the archway on the river and then ascend or descend towards the shore according to the place where he would find himself. Cheered by this hope, he fancied himself already seated by Annabel telling her of his strange adventure, and begging her to forgive him the anxiety which he had most involuntarily caused her. With the incredible speed characteristic of thought, which is a fluid as swift, or even swifter than electricity, innumerable lovely pictures passed through his mind during the short space of time it took him to go down three steps. He saw himself before the altar, pressing Miss Annabel Vyvyan's delicate hand, then on the threshold of the nuptial chamber, and, in a still more distant picture, in his country seat at Richmond. He was standing by Annabel's side under the veranda at the top of the marble steps, watching a lovely, fair-

haired child playing upon the green sward with a tame deer.

His beautiful dreams vanished suddenly and were replaced by the vision and the hallucination of despair. His outstretched hand had struck against an iron grating. The road was barred on this side, and on the other return was impossible. Arundel's exhausted strength could never have sufficed to raise the heavy trap-door.

"What have I done, O God, to be damned alive?" he cried sorrowfully. "What unknown crime am I to expiate here? Oh, Annabel! however sad the suppositions in which you are now doubtless indulging as to my fate, they are far from approaching the reality." And by a last effort of ever-springing hope, which never abandons man, and which abides with the victim even when his neck is under the knife, Benedict shook each one of the bars, one after another, trying to move or to draw them away; but they were fastened firmly, and rust had soldered the joints. A score of times, having found the lock, poor Benedict tore his fingers as he attempted to unscrew it or to shoot back the bolt. While he indulged in this useless attempt, for the massive and complicated lock would

have done honour to the door of one of the Newgate cells, a wave lapped him with its icy-cold caress. Benedict, chilled, his teeth chattering, his wedding garments wetted, ascended a few steps to avoid the water, and sat down like one of the sombre, crouching figures which Dante Alighieri has placed upon the steps of his Hell. He remained there with the gloomy resignation of the wild beast at bay, of the savage taken prisoner, — how long he knew not, whether it was an eternity or an hour only. He had no longer a clear perception of things, and the wheels of madness were beginning to whirl in his head.

During a moment of comparative calm, he thought he would like to know the hour, remembering that he had his repeater in his pocket; but his hand, chilled by cold, pressed the spring too strongly or unskilfully. It broke and sounded stridently under the gold of the case. Poor Benedict was in the position of those prisoners in the Siberian mines who are made to work for two hours and then sleep for two hours, in order that they may not know how much time they have left; for although they never see the sun, the division of work and rest would allow them to count. To await death in darkness without knowing

the time, — what a torture! one which Satan has forgotten.

Soon nothing was heard under the vault save the low sound made by the yawl, as it rose and fell on the tide, and bumped against the wall of the subterranean canal.

VIII

AFTER a time which seemed eternal to Sir Arundel, but which in reality was not much more than an hour, — for time does not exist, and despair or weariness may make a minute seem an age, — a dull sound of steps was heard above the vault, and some rays of light showed the place where lay the trap-door. Soon the heavy door was lifted, a livid, flickering ray fell in the damp obscurity, and through the narrow opening showed, by the side of a candle, Saunders' characteristic face.

Arundel hastily ascended the steps, and though he was bold as the brave knights from whom he was descended, it was not without a real feeling of pleasure that he saw Saunders' head at the top of the stairs. A winged cherub would not have seemed lovelier to him, and yet there was nothing celestial about Saunders. But Arundel felt at the sight of him the same joy as a man buried alive, who sees the tombstone lifted up, and to whom the hideous

Shakespearean grave-digger is a bright angel of light. Although the hero of a novel should never be susceptible to any emotions except love, it is uncommonly unpleasant to die of cold and starvation in a frock coat, white gloves and patent-leather boots, in an icy cave on a stair washed by the tide, on the day of one's own wedding with one of the loveliest heiresses in London.

"Where the devil has he got to?" murmured Saunders, before the ray of the candle fell upon Arundel in the darkness. "I am quite sure I double locked the grating, and the bars are close enough to each other for the finest gentleman, even if he wore a woman's corset, to find it impossible to get through. He is bound to be either in the room or in the passageway. Well, I'll go down and explore for myself."

Scarcely had Saunders set foot upon the upper steps when he found himself face to face with Arundel, who was hastily coming up.

"Oh! there you are, sir," said the sailor with an air of rough cordiality and visible satisfaction. "You found the second room of your apartment somewhat cold and damp, did n't you? You regretted the first." And with his rough hand, he supported

Sir Benedict Arundel, who was staggering on the edge of the trap.

Benedict let himself fall on the bench near the table. Saunders poked up the half-burned coal and made it flame again. Arundel, revived by the warm air of the room, and assured at least of not dying without explanation, actually thought the horrible den with its queer, sinister drawings almost pleasant, and experienced comparative comfort. Saunders' face, though rough, was not malevolent, and Benedict attempted to draw him into conversation.

"What is the meaning," he said, "of this absurd kidnapping? Do you intend to rob me, to have me sign drafts, or to murder me?"

Saunders shook his head and answered, "I think, on the contrary, that if you needed money, sir, it would be given you."

"Then what do you want to do with me?"

"I don't know, but nothing to harm you, for on the contrary I have been told to take the greatest care of you, and you will be treated as carefully as a case of clocks or Bohemian glass."

"Do you know the man by whom I was walking in the lane, Sir Arthur Sidney?"

"I saw him to-day for the first time," answered Saunders, whose steel-blue eyes steadily sustained Sir Benedict's penetrating glance.

"Then Sidney has nothing to do with this abominable conspiracy," said Benedict to himself, happy at being able to dismiss a suspicion which had painfully weighed on his mind. "But how is it that, being so close to me, he did not assist me and did not call for help?" he thought, as doubt again recurred to him.

"What induced you to do this?" continued Arundel; "you would be severely punished if the law got hold of you."

"I obeyed the orders of those whom I promised to obey, and as for the law —" Saunders shrugged his shoulders significantly, by way of inferring that he was uncommonly sceptical with regard to the perspicacity of the police.

"And who are the people whom you obey in such venturesome enterprises?"

"If I were to tell you their names, you would be no wiser. You have never had anything to do with them."

"Well, do you know who I am?"

"No. I know neither your name nor your title.

Only I can tell by your aristocratic face, your small hands, and the quality of your clothes and linen, that you belong to the aristocracy."

"If you will open that door to me and take me back to the street, I am rich enough to secure you a small competence which would enable you to live as you please in the country you prefer."

On hearing this proposal, Saunders' tanned face turned brick red, and his sea-blue eyes sparkled in his face, which had become sombre. He quickly recovered himself, and quietly replied: "Although the business I am in is not a very clean one, I am not in the habit of betraying those who have trusted me, even when it is an ugly piece of business. Besides, even if I were willing to set you at liberty in return for your gold, I could not do it. The door is locked outside, and I am as much a prisoner as you are."

A moment of silence followed this reply. Then Saunders, whose face had resumed its natural colour, opened a closet in the wall and drew from it a piece of salt beef, some bread, and a pewter of beer, which he placed upon the table beside Arundel, saying with a respectfully jovial look: "You must have breakfasted early this morning, sir; I fancy you did not have any

luncheon, and it is long past the dinner hour. However troubled you may be, nature does not lose its rights, and though your heart is filled with grief, you may not be sorry to eat something."

In spite of his despair and his anger, Arundel, or at least the physical part of him, recognised the soundness of the reasoning, drew near the food provided by Saunders, and began to eat, with grief, but with a fairly good appetite.

"The meat is not very delicate," said Saunders, "yet that salt beef was cut from the haunch of one of the best Lancashire beeves, and this beer, darker than pitch and topped by golden froth, is double stout, the best brewed in Dublin with barley and hops, such as you cannot match in the most famous London tavern."

Benedict acknowledged the truth of Saunders' remarks as he cut several slices of the beef thus praised, and drained to the dregs the pewter pot.

IX

SIR BENEDICT ARUNDEL'S frugal repast was scarcely ended, when the trap-door opened and the four fellows whose appearance from underground I have already described, issued slowly from below. One of them exchanged a few words with Saunders in a strange tongue, which Benedict could not understand. The sentences appeared to be composed of a single word, as in idioms which one does not know. It was Gaelic, with, to make it more difficult to understand, a certain number of slang words.

Two of the new-comers approached the trap, and Saunders, advancing towards Sir Benedict Arundel, said to him: "If you will be kind enough to follow us, sir, — it is time to start."

"To start!" cried Arundel, withdrawing instinctively from the trap.

"I hope, sir," said Saunders, politely, "you will understand that it is better to come with us willingly. There are five of us, able-bodied, every one armed, so

that it is no use to make a fight. It is our business to carry out the orders we have received; if need be, we shall use force, — as little as necessary, for we do not wish to harm you."

"I will follow you," answered Arundel, seeing that it was hopeless to do anything else, and thinking to himself that he would have a chance to escape once he got outside.

The company disappeared down the black opening, Saunders going last, leading Benedict, resigned to his fate for the time being. They went down some twenty steps, and reached the grating which had stopped Arundel's escape. There Saunders said to him: —

"I shall be obliged to gag you, sir, though I should be very sorry to do so, unless you will give me your word of honour not to shout and not to call for help. I do not care to muzzle you like a calf crying for its mother."

As the result would be the same in either case, whether he were gagged or gave his word, Arundel promised to keep silence.

"I will not ask you not to try to escape; that is my business," said Saunders, putting the gag back

into his pocket, and taking out the key to open the grating.

One of the sailors held the lantern up, and the key, having been put into the lock rusted by the damp, would have turned with difficulty in a hand less vigorous than that of Saunders. He turned it three times, and the heavy gate, pushed by two of the sailors, grated on its hinges with a harsh sound. The men sat down on their thwarts and placed their sweeps on the gunwale of the yawl with perfect symmetry, waiting orders. Saunders seated himself in the stern-sheets with Benedict by his side. Just as the boat, impelled forward by the oars, was starting, a stray gleam of the lantern showed for a moment in the bow a sombre figure enveloped in a cloak cast over the shoulder, and wearing a hat pulled down over his eyes; but Saunders blew out the lantern, and everything was dark again.

In the course of a few moments the boat issued from the sombre canal on to the waters of the Thames. The fog, blown away by the wind, was vanishing in rags like pieces of stuff carried off by the tempest. The heavens were low, gloomy, and black like the vault of a tomb filled with the smoke of the visitors' torches. The sinister dome, in which lighter veins

represented cracks, seemed about to fall in great blocks upon the sleeping town, the dentellated ebony silhouette of which on either side of the river was studded with only occasional dots of light. The night was a horrible one.

A heavy sea was running. The cables of the ships drew taut with painful creakings like those of the muscles of a patient stretched on the rack; boats collided with lugubrious sounds, and the heavy water fell back on itself with a sigh of oppression and exhaustion, like that which issues from a chest oppressed by the nightmare. The wind uttered moans like the cries of a child murdered by witches in their nameless work, and over the maze of plaintive, indefinable, and sinister sounds, soared like the low rumble of thunder the distant moaning of the waves returning to their homes.

The buildings along the river — stores, warehouses, works with tall obelisks blue with flames, landing-places with broad steps, churches raising above the houses their great Norman towers or their pseudo-classic campaniles — lost in the shadow the mean appearance they had in daylight, and assumed cyclopæan and colossal proportions. The roofs became oriental terraces, the chimney-pots obelisks and lighthouses,

the gigantic sign of open-work letters looked like the traceried balustrade of an aerial balcony; the whole place, sombre, immense, and vague, seemed a Nineveh over which was passing the cloud of the wrath of God. A mezzotint engraver would have made of it, with a few gleams of livid light, one of those terrific Biblical pictures in which the English excel.

Sir Benedict Arundel, seeing the boat passing fairly near to the shore, and feeling the hand with which Saunders grasped his arm as with an iron ring somewhat less close, thought he had a chance to deceive his keeper, and made such an abrupt jump that the boat nearly upset. He was almost over the gunwale, his feet were touching the water, and a few strokes alone separated him from the shore; but Saunders' vigorous grasp, clutching him like pincers, brought him back to his seat, and with a mighty push compelled him to keep down. During this episode, as rapid as thought, the stranger, motionless and silent in the bows, had risen, stretching out his hands as if to help Saunders, for the four rowers had all they could do to keep the boat on an even keel in the swirl of the tide. As the stranger moved, the folds of his cloak fell aside, and Benedict thought he recognised the face of his friend

Sidney, but the man drew his cloak over his shoulder so that the upper portion of it concealed his face, while his eyes were hidden in the shadow projected by the broad-brimmed hat; his identity had again become impenetrable.

Meanwhile the gale increased. The furious wind seemed to take filaments of rain and shoot them hissing from its bow like icy arrows. The dense spray filled the air, and the foam of the waves, blown in patches, scattered sparkling through the darkness. The sea was so heavy that it often rose over the gunwale, and the rowers, their feet braced against the stretchers, their bodies bent back, and tugging away with all their might at the oars, had the greatest difficulty in keeping the boat straight.

Concealed between two great waves, the yawl passed unperceived before the police station, the red lamp of which seemed half asleep, like the eyes of a drunkard.

"It is blowing fit to take your hair off," murmured Saunders; and seeing that Benedict was shivering in his thin black coat, he threw over him a coarse cloak which he picked up with his feet from the bottom of the boat. "One thing is sure," he went on, "in this weather we shall not meet many boats on the Thames.

The weather favours us, — a little too much, perhaps," he added, as he was struck in the face by the spray of a breaking wave.

The passage under the bridges was particularly terrifying. The water rolled under the arches in sombre cataracts with a terrifying noise and fearful spraying; the wind, which was blowing in the opposite direction, opposed, though it could not stop, the wild rush of the waves, which whirled in eddies and were maddened by this resistance in the narrow passage between the piles, which caused their mass to bound back. The wind howled, the water hissed and roared, and the damp echoes of the arches repeated these noises and made them more frightful still.

The boat, steered with miraculous tact and almost inconceivable perspicacity in the deep night, shot safely through the centre of the safest arch and then issued on the other side, dainty, coquettish, and proud, as it had certainly the right to be.

As it was passing Blackfriars Bridge, a white shape, falling from above, shot rapidly past the axis of the arch and fell in the water like swan's-down a short distance from the boat. The swan's-down struggled, and the two arms of a woman showed above the skirt bal-

looned by the fall. When the yawl, carried along, passed near the pale phantom floating on the black waters like an elf or a nixie of the German legends, two desperate hands grasped the gunwale with such nervous vigour, though they were weak and delicate, that the nails sank into the wood like iron claws. If any one in the boat had thought of looking up, and especially if the night had been less dark, he might have caught a glimpse of a human form bending over the parapet of the bridge.

The boat heeled over suddenly, shipped a sea, and would have capsized had the men not immediately leaned over to the other side. A terrified face, so pale that it was visible even in the darkness, rose above the edge of the boat amid soaking hair; the two dilated eyes shone like globules of burnished silver, and the purple lips spoke these words in inexpressible accents:

"Save me! save me!"

"What 's to be done?" cried Saunders. "If she goes on like that she will upset us or stop our way; and yet it would be hard to cut off her hands, though there is no other way to make her let go, and duck her again in that ugly black water which so frightens her."

"That would be an abominable crime," said Bene-

dict, as he seized the unfortunate woman's arms and tried to pull her into the boat.

The men moved over to the other side, and as the mysterious individual in the bows said nothing, Saunders helped Benedict, and soon the woman, having been helped into the yawl, sat down, or rather sank, at Benedict's feet.

The boat's speed, retarded for a moment by this incident, was increased to make up for lost time; London Bridge was soon left behind, and the yawl flew faster than an arrow among the lines of vessels, the yards of which creaked with a mournful sound, while the blocks shrieked like night birds.

A deep silence reigned in the boat; the men seemed to hold their breath; the muffled oars struck the water quietly, as if it were a mist, and the only sound heard was the chattering of the teeth of the poor woman, shivering in her wet garments.

They at last emerged from the great city of ships that lies between London Bridge and the Isle of Dogs, and the oarsmen pulled harder and less carefully in a less turbulent seaway, for the fury of the storm was now somewhat spent.

Benedict, who had stretched a portion of the over-

coat Saunders had lent him over the shoulders of the unfortunate young woman, — who had nothing on but a white muslin dress, — did not suspect that he had seen her already once that day, under the porch of Saint Margaret's, where his coat-sleeve had brushed against her lace veil; and surely poor Edith Harley, for she it was, was far from supposing that the man at whose feet she was sobbing convulsively on this icy-cold night was the unfortunate Benedict Arundel.

A strange destiny had brought together in this frail boat, in the midst of the storm, a wifeless husband and a husbandless wife; a capricious will, parting couples that seemed so well made for each other, had formed a new combination out of the broken and disjoined pieces.

X

THE boat proceeded some distance further, until it was nearly opposite Gravesend. The tempest had calmed down, and the sky, though still threatening, allowed a few stars to show in the dark blue of night, through broader openings in the clouds. The sea, moved to its very depths, was still running heavily, and breaking upon the shores of the river, which here broadened out into an estuary. The wind roared in the distance like a snarling, cowardly dog that has been kicked.

A black hull, surmounted by light spars, seemed to emerge from the water, and showed faintly in the dark; it was the "Lovely Jenny" at anchor. She had been masked till then by a turn in the river. Every one on board appeared to be sound asleep; the hatches were carefully closed; not a light was visible; nothing was heard but the creaking of the blocks and the last blasts of the storm. Such a silence was too deep to be natural; in fact, the "Lovely Jenny" slept with one

eye open, for the yawl had no sooner come within hail than a head showed above the rail, and bending towards the stream, called out in a low but distinct voice, "Hello! ahoy, is that you?"

"Yes," replied Saunders, in the same careful way, "and here is the watchword: Crabs walk backwards, but they reach their destination."

"That is a wise maxim," added Macgill, as he showed at the top of the side-ladder.

The boat had come alongside the "Lovely Jenny," and Saunders, still holding Arundel's arm with one hand, with the other seized one of the side lines, and began to ascend the ladder. Arundel thought for a moment of letting himself fall, but Saunders' hand held him like a vice; and besides, the other men who were coming up had their hands within reach of his feet, and would no doubt have held him back. Then he might also have fallen into the boat below.

Any attempt at escape being therefore impossible, he continued to ascend as slowly as if he were going up to the gallows, for he felt that every step he took separated him still further from Annabel. The way he was being transferred, with so much precaution and mystery, to a vessel that seemed to be waiting for him,

proved that the plan had long been laid. All these silent agents were obeying a will whose purpose he could not fathom. What did they propose to do with him? To carry him to some distant place, to keep him in return for a ransom to be exacted from his parents or his friends? Was he a victim, in London itself, of a band of brigands such as those who carry their prisoners away into the mountains, and then send to the city one of the ears of their prisoner, by way of hastening payment?

After having intrusted Sir Benedict Arundel to Jack and Macgill, Saunders went down into the boat again. "What are we to do with the woman?" he asked of the man with the cloak, still seated in the bows; "it would be pretty hard to throw her overboard again, after having saved her life."

"Take her up on deck," sharply returned the man wrapped up in the mantle.

Edith had listened to this conversation, which was to decide her fate, as if she were wholly unconcerned in it. She was shivering all over, and delirium was already attacking her brain. A prey to the daze of fever, she allowed herself to be taken up and carried away like a sick child by its nurse. Saunders, accus-

tomed to heavier burdens, climbed the ladder as nimbly as a cat, and soon reached the deck with Miss Edith, whom he placed against the mast, for she could scarcely stand; her limp limbs, no longer guided by her will, refused to perform their office. The man with the mantle ordered Saunders to take her below, where she could neither see nor be seen.

The order was at once carried out, and the deck of the "Lovely Jenny," once more deserted, sounded only under the steps of the man with the mantle, who walked up and down the quarter-deck, noting the veering of the wind. Benedict had also been at once led into the main cabin, by Jack and Macgill, and carefully locked up in his new prison.

The cabin was adorned with much elegance: the bed, concealed by damask curtains was of mahogany; a black horsehair sofa, a swinging table, and a small lamp hanging from the ceiling, — formed the furniture. But the port, as Benedict immediately discovered, was formed of a round piece of ground glass, carefully fitted, and so thick as to neither allow any one to look out nor to give any hope of escaping that way. The door appeared to be as carefully closed.

Seeing that any attempt at flight was useless, Arundel

sat down on the sofa, and remained there sunk into something approaching insensibility, enduring his fate with the dull patience of a savage or a captive wild animal. He was weary of making suppositions and useless projects; neither perspicacity, intelligence, nor resolution could be of any use to him. Caught in a hopeless net by an unknown enemy, like a poor fly in the web of a mysterious spider, the only result of his struggles would be to make his position worse; a victim to a horrible trick or an infamous piece of treachery, he had simply to await his fate silently. Worn out by the events and emotions of that terrible day, though he desired to remain awake and to note what would happen, he felt his eyelids close in spite of himself. Although his mind was wide awake, his body was sinking into sleep.

Meanwhile the wind had veered, and Captain Peppercull, who was engaged in drinking rum to keep out the night air, abandoned his pleasant occupation, and on the advice of the stranger with the black mantle, who had watched the wind with the eye of an experienced sea-faring man, went up on deck, staggering a little. As the fog was particularly damp that night, Captain Peppercull, like a very prudent man, had taken

extraordinary precautions against it; but he was not the kind of fellow to be overcome by a glass of rum, and two or three breaths of fresh air soon made him himself again.

"Captain, the tide is with us, the wind has gone around; we must be off to sea, for our expedition to England is over," said the man with the mantle, as Peppercull came on deck.

"To hear is to obey," replied the latter, unconsciously parodying the formula of Eastern devotion; for the man with the mantle seemed to inspire him with respect mixed with fear, though naturally Captain Peppercull was neither servile nor cowardly. The word was passed to heave the anchor, the capstan bars were shipped, and the crew having manned them began to walk around, singing on a plaintive rhythm a singular chant composed of the plaint of the wind, the sob of the wave, and the cry of the gull, in which the restlessness of nature seems to mingle with human effort. The anchor came away, and already several turns of the chain had been rolled around the drum of the capstan, wetting the deck with mud.

By the strange sound, and the regular trampling which accompanied it, Benedict — who was already half

carried away into a dream full of strange catastrophes and sinister apparitions, the confused image of his adventures of the day — understood that the anchor was being got up and the vessel preparing to start. Although this did not make his situation much worse, and at bottom he cared little enough whether he was a captive in a motionless prison or in a travelling one, he felt deep sadness overcoming him. To be a prisoner in England, in a land full of friends engaged in seeking him out, to breathe the same air as Annabel, — was still some consolation; now he could not count upon the efforts of his relatives and friends to find him out. How would it be possible to discover his track in a wake which vanished almost as soon as formed? Annabel was lost forever to him.

The singular chant still continued. Soon the anchor was catted and fished; the crew, running up to the tops and out on the yards, loosed the sails, which opened to the breeze like the wings of a sea-bird about to take flight; but held in by the sheets and tacks, they bellied out, swelled, and imparting their own impulsion to the "Lovely Jenny," made her gracefully heel over.

Macgill, standing by the panel lighted by a trembling light, held the wheel, steering the "Lovely Jenny,"

which was as sensitive as a horse with a tender mouth is to the action of the bit and bridle; he shook her up or eased her away, avoiding the ships and boats which the approach of daylight called from their torpor, and which were tacking and cross-tacking in every direction on the broad estuary.

The morning began to show: lines of faint light rayed the thick banks of clouds; the red lanterns of the lightships were turning paler in the blaze of nascent day; the banks of the stream, scarcely visible, were vanishing on the horizon, and the yellow waters rose and fell in broader seas. One felt the nearness of the open, and the "Lovely Jenny," cradled by the roll, pitched and scended in a smother of foam.

Benedict, half asleep, was leaning upon his horsehair pillow when the creaking of the door quickly awakened him; the panel slipped along its grooves, and the man with the black mantle appeared on the threshold of the cabin.

The room was dark and Benedict was unable to make out at once the features of the man who broke upon his solitude; the shade of the broad-brimmed hat stil' concealed his face, and the folds of the mantle his figure.

The new-comer's intention was not to maintain his

incognito longer, for he advanced under the small lamp that was burning, threw back his mantle, took off his hat, and revealed to the surprised glance of Arundel the face of Sir Arthur Sidney. Arundel could not keep back a cry of surprise. Sir Arthur Sidney remained perfectly calm, opposite his friend, as if nothing extraordinary had happened; the light of the lamp, playing upon his satiny brow, formed a sort of halo around his head; his glance was calm, and his features expressed perfect serenity.

"What, is it you, Arthur?"

"Yes, I returned from India this morning."

"What does this mean, Arthur?" cried Benedict, convinced at last of Sidney's identity.

"It means," quietly replied Sidney, "that I had not consented to your marriage, and I had to stop it; I must ask you to forgive the means I had to employ — I had no others, and so used these."

"That is very strange conduct of yours," replied Benedict, somewhat disconcerted by the calm simplicity of the answer. "Are you my father, my uncle, or my guardian, to assume such rights over me?"

"I am more than that; I am your friend," replied Sidney, gravely.

"It is a curious way to prove it, to destroy the happiness of my life and plunge me into the most dreadful despair."

"Your grief will pass away," said Arthur, "lovers' pains do not last long; the wind carries them away like sea-gulls' feathers at sea. Besides, you do not belong to yourself," he continued, drawing from his pocket a paper which he unfolded and presented to Benedict.

The paper, already yellowed by time, seemed to have been written long since; the folds were worn, the ink had no doubt changed colour; the writing was reddish, as if blood had been used instead of ink.

At the sight of this cabalistic-looking paper, which was not unlike a pact with the devil, Sir Benedict Arundel seemed embarrassed and kept silence.

"Is that your signature?" said Sidney, holding the paper to Benedict's eyes.

"Yes, that is my name," replied Sir Benedict, in a resigned tone.

"Did you freely put your name there?"

"I cannot say that I was forced," answered Arundel. "Yes, I did write my name there, when I was full of enthusiasm and faith."

"The oath contained in this letter is a dread one. You swore by whatever can bind a man on the earth on which we live, by the God who created the worlds, by the demon who seeks to destroy them, by Heaven and Hell, by your father's honour and your mother's virtue, by your blood as a gentleman, by your soul as a Christian, by your word as a free man, by the memory of heroes and saints, on the Gospels and on the sword; and in case our religion should be but a mistake, you swore by fire and water, the sources of life, by the secret forces of nature, by the stars, the mysterious regulators of Fate, by Chronos and Jupiter, by Acheron and by Styx, which formerly bound the gods. If there be on earth a more irrevocable formula, I do not know of it; but when you wrote those lines you sought everything most dread and sacred, to give force to the oath contained in this paper."

"That is true," replied Arundel.

"I needed you," continued Sidney, "and in virtue of the rights which this paper confers upon me, I came to fetch you, since you did not come."

Benedict, as if cast down, bent his head and made no answer.

"When you are calmer," continued Sidney, "I

shall tell you what I expect of you, and what you will have to do." Whereupon he withdrew, closing behind him the sliding panel; and the "Lovely Jenny," driven by a strong wind, made her way into the open sea.

XI

I SHALL profit by the fact that the "Lovely Jenny" is reeling off her ten knots an hour, with a good breeze, to go back some distance in my story. I have to explain how Miss Edith happened to be in the Thames on that stormy night, about to be swallowed up in the waters, instead of being in her scented bridal chamber.

No doubt my readers will remember that a meanly dressed man had handed Count de Volmerange a sealed letter, as he left the church. That letter the Count, his mind full of other matters, had left in his pocket without opening it, thinking he would read it later; but he had forgotten to do so amid the emotions of the day. In the evening, however, having been left alone for a moment, he felt the paper crackling in his pocket, and mechanically opened and read it.

At that very moment he was informed that Edith was waiting for him. He arose, straight and stiff like the statue of the Commander when invited by Lepo-

rello to sup with Don Juan. In his hand he clutched the fatal paper. A deadly pallor overspread his face, in which his dark blue eyes showed bloodshot. His feet struck the floor heavily, as if they were of marble. Borne down by the weight of crushing misfortune, he stepped heavily like the marble apparition.

Edith, protected by the transparent shade of the curtains, half concealed her face in the lace-trimmed pillow; her bloodless cheeks were so white they could scarcely be distinguished from the cambric on which they rested.

She was a prey to terrible perplexity; she was agitated by the knowledge of her fault, and knew not what to resolve. Time and again she had endeavoured to make a confession, and yet had been unable to begin; nothing seemed to lead up to so strange a confidence. That most improbable *liaison*, the result of almost supernatural fascination, had remained absolutely unsuspected by all. Everybody around Edith had such complete faith in her purity, that she herself at times wondered whether she had lost it. There was no opening for such a confidence. Her blushes, her pallor, her silence, were mistaken for the maidenly emotions which young girls experience as

the marriage day approaches. Even legitimate love has its troubles, and tears are the order of the day in the eyes of young brides.

Every morning she said to herself, "I must speak," but the day would pass without her having spoken. The preparations for the wedding went on without her venturing to stay them, and the revelation became more and more impossible. She loved Volmerange, and although she was a girl of perfectly truthful character, to whom the very shadow of deceit was repugnant, she had not the strength to destroy her own happiness. She had felt cowardly at the thought of such a misfortune, and like all people who reckon on some impossible event to free them from a desperate situation, she had allowed matters to take their course; now the terrible moment had arrived, and like a dove crouching on the ground as she hears around her the swooping of the hawk, she was waiting and trembling with anxiety and terror. Then it occurred to her it would have been best to refuse Volmerange, and not to accept the happiness of which she was no longer worthy. Now, however, it was too late.

It should be said in Edith's favour, that she was guilty, but not degraded; hers was one of those natures

which evil can touch but cannot penetrate, like marble, which mud soils, but does not stain, and which the rain of heaven makes purer and whiter than before. Her fall was due to the noblest motives. Xavier had played to Edith a comedy of misfortune; he had represented himself as an oppressed, misunderstood man, compelled to remain within his humble sphere by the invincible prejudices of aristocracy; and he had contended that Lord Harley's daughter could love but a lord, a fashionable man with a large fortune. These things, said very quietly, with an air of coldness and resignation, but with eyes that burned with suppressed passion, had impelled Edith's noble and chivalrous nature to a mad devotion and consolation.

She thought she should play the part of Providence to that exiled angel, who was but a fiend; so she had given herself to him, mistaking pity for love. Volmerange's genuine passion had soon made her feel how greatly she had been mistaken; and besides, Xavier, having once triumphed over her, had speedily unmasked himself, and far from opposing, as would have seemed natural, the marriage of Edith and Volmerange, he had in a way insisted upon it, in the pursuit of a dark and sinister purpose, impossible to fathom. Besides, Vol-

merange was so madly in love with Edith that her confession might have upset his reason. Up to a certain point, Edith might still think herself worthy of being loved by an honourable man, and her silence was not perfidious.

When Volmerange entered, Edith understood she was lost. The Count drew near the bed, and slowly and automatically held out the paper to the terrified girl, who huddled up under the blankets with a gesture of instinctive fear.

"Tell me," cried the Count, in a choking voice, with a sort of strident rattle, "tell me that the statements in this letter are false, and I shall believe you, even though the light should blind me."

Poor Edith, half-crazed by terror, sat up, and with haggard eye, trembling lips, pallid cheeks, as if she beheld the Medusa head, looked with the dull, lack-lustre glance of dementia at the paper on which flamed her condemnation. Her sudden gesture had broken the ribbon that held her hair, and her black curls flowed over her shoulders and bosom, — contrasting strongly with their pallid whiteness. Desdemona herself did not start more terrified or more pale at the sinister question of the Moor of Venice; and though

Volmerange was not black as a Moor, he nevertheless had a fierce and terrible air.

There was a moment of silence, full of expectation, anguish, and terror.

Outside, the tempest raged; showers of rain lashed the panes; the wind seemed to press against the window as if to enter, apparently desiring to be present at this nocturnal scene. The house, beaten by the gale, trembled on its foundations; the doors creaked; confused plaints sounded through the corridors; the lamp burned down, revived at times, and cast a pale light, — everything tending to increase the terror of the situation.

The clock struck two. The sound, usually so clear and silvery, now struck lugubriously on the ear.

Volmerange bent over the bed, gnashing his teeth, his eyes flashing; he seized Edith by the arm with imperious brutality, and repeated his words sharply and feverishly. He foamed at the mouth, and had bitten his lips so hard during the moment of silence that they were bleeding.

The girl, seeing so close to her that face whose wondrous beauty could not be effaced even by the contraction of fury, and which recalled the lineaments of

an angered archangel, — felt her strength give way; the fear of swooning came upon her, and she would have lost consciousness if a violent shock had not recalled her to herself. She felt as if her arm had been pulled away from her shoulder. Volmerange had dragged her from the bed; she was in the middle of the room. Another shock made her fall on her knees.

"It is well," said Volmerange; "you shall die!" and he stormed around the room like a madman, looking for a weapon with which to carry out his threat.

"Oh, do not harm me," murmured Edith, in a voice full of anguish.

Volmerange was still searching; a bridal chamber is not usually provided with daggers, pistols, tomahawks, or other lethal weapons.

"Blood and thunder!" cursed he as he raged around like a wild beast, "shall I be obliged to smash her head against the furniture, to strangle her with my hands, to tear her veins open with my nails, or to stifle her under the mattress of my wedding couch? Ha! ha! that would be beautiful," he continued with a maniacal laugh. "A pretty scene, most dramatic and most Shakespearean, in truth!"

He drew near Edith, who was still kneeling, her

arms limp, her hands open, her head bowed upon her breast, her hair hanging down, — in the attitude of Canova's Magdalen. As she saw the madman approach her, the poor child, moved by a supreme instinct of self-preservation, rose as if pushed by a spring, ran to the French window, which opened on the garden, threw it open with the unconscious skill of somnabulists and people in a desperate position, and sprang, borne along by fear, into the dark walks of the garden, followed by Volmerange.

She did not feel the gravel and shells hurting her delicate bare feet; the rain-laden branches swept her face and her bare shoulders, and seemed to try to hold her back by the folds of her wrapper. The burning breath of Volmerange almost reached her neck, and several times the madman's desperate hands had almost grasped her.

She thus reached the parapet of the terrace, which she leapt over, leaving on the iron spikes a fragment of muslin — the only trace left on which Lord and Lady Harley could build conjectures. Her husband reached the street almost as soon as she did, and the pursuit continued.

Poor Edith's strength was beginning to give way; her knees knocked against each other; the blood

surged in her temples; her breath came short and quick. She had already traversed, poor hunted doe, one or two streets, deserted on account of the advanced hour and the storm; but even if a belated passer-by had happened to be there, he would not have helped her, taking her for a street-walker escaping after a row in some nocturnal orgy, or pursued by some one she had robbed.

In the course of her flight she reached the Thames, and Blackfriars Bridge, and began to cross it breathless and with slower steps. When she was near the centre, her breath and her strength abandoning her, her feet bleeding, her wrapper covered with mud, soaked by the last showers of the storm, and clinging to her burning, chilled body, — she stopped and leaned against the parapet, resolved no longer to dispute her life; after all, it was still a happiness to die by his hand, since she could no longer live for him.

The Count, having come up to her, seized her two arms and said to her: —

"Swear that the contents of the letter are false."

Edith, who, after yielding to the impulse of physical terror, had recovered all her natural dignity, replied: —

"The letter tells the truth; I will not save my life by a falsehood."

Volmerange raised her as if she had been a feather, and swung her for a moment beyond the parapet over the black gulf. The invisible waters roared and stormed under the arch; never had a thicker night overspread the Thames.

"Sombre abyss, keep forever the secret of my dishonour!" said the Count, leaning half way over the parapet. Then he opened his hands.

A plaint as soft as the sigh of a stifled dove was Edith's last prayer. The wind uttered a long moan of despair, and a light white flake fell through the thick mist like a feather falling from a swan's wing, and dropped into the river; from above, it was impossible to hear the sound of the fall, drowned by the murmur of the water, the creaking of boats, the shrieking of the gale, and the innumerable sounds which form the lamentation of nature on a stormy night.

"Now for the other," said Volmerange, as he retraced his steps; "I must find him, were he concealed in the very lowest circle of hell."

And he plunged into the labyrinth of streets, with a swift, resolute step.

Carried away by the rapidity of my narration, I did not state that a man, who might have been taken for a shadow, stood close to the wall of the Count's house. Was he watching for himself or for some one else? That is what I am not aware of. Was he a thief, a lover, a spy, a foe, or a friend? Did he foresee the catastrophe which was bound to come, and did he desire to witness it, himself invisible? I am not yet in position to answer these questions. All I can say is that the nocturnal prowler saw Edith spring from the terrace, Volmerange pursue her and throw her into the Thames, without attempting to interfere with the dreadful affair, satisfied with being a silent spectator of it. When Volmerange, having accomplished his vengeance, returned into the city, the shadow followed him from afar, keeping step with him, so as to not lose sight of him, and yet not to be noticed.

His brain whirling, his heart filled with rage and regrets, Volmerange walked on to Regent's Park, where, overcome by fatigue, grief, and despair, he let himself fall on a bench at the foot of a tree, in a state of complete prostration. His mind was a blank, and his head nodded on his shoulders; his

vigorous figure was limp; he sank into that dull stupor by which nature, weary of suffering, avoids moral or physical torture.

While he dozed, the dark shadow drew near him, with so light, furtive and cat-like a step that not a grain of sand moved, not a blade of grass bent. He placed on Volmerange's knees a paper of curious shape, and an envelope full of letters; then withdrawing still more softly, concealed himself behind the trees, from which he could not be distinguished.

Light as had been the touch, it woke Volmerange, who saw the paper and the envelope placed so mysteriously on his knees, and ran to the lamp. The envelope contained letters from Edith, proving her guilt; the paper bore these words: —

"I swear never to dispose of my person, never to bind myself in any way, by marriage or otherwise, and to ever hold myself free for the supreme junta; I swear it by the God who created the worlds, by the demon who seeks to destroy them, by Heaven and Hell, by my father's honour and my mother's virtue, by my blood as a gentleman, by my soul as a Christian, by my word as a free man, by the memory of heroes and saints, on the Gospels and on my sword, and in case our religion

should be but a mistake, I swear by fire and water, the sources of life, by the secret forces of nature, by the stars, the mysterious regulators of Fate, by Chronos and Jupiter, by Acheron and by Styx, which formerly bound the gods.

"Signed with my blood,

"VOLMERANGE."

XII

AFTER he had read, the Count, maddened with grief and rage, traversed the park in every direction, seeking the mysterious being who while he dozed had thrown on his knees Edith's letters and the formula of the pact which bound him to an unknown power. In vain he traversed the walks and explored the shrubbery; he failed to discover any one. It is true the night was dark, and the pale light of distant lamps alone guided him in his pursuit. Wearied by his mad chase, he left the park and walked towards Primrose Hill.

The houses became more scattered, the fields began to invade the city, and soon he found himself in the country, climbing the lower slopes of the hill.

His goings and comings had taken time, and the late November dawn was beginning to show in the heaven, filled with great clouds like huge bodies left on the tempest's battlefield. Nothing could be more unlike Homer's rosy-fingered dawn than this sinister British sunrise.

He let himself fall at the foot of a tree, that shivered in the sharp breeze of morning, having lost already more than half its leaves, and drew from his pocket Edith's lacerated letters, which he had put there mechanically. While they left him no doubt as to his own misfortune, they were written in a constrained style; passion expressed itself in them with embarrassment; it seemed as though the girl had yielded to involuntary fascination rather than to sympathy.

This reading embittered still further Volmerange's suffering, but read he must, in order to justify his vengeance to himself. After his violent and terrible act doubts had occurred to him, not as to the certainty of Edith's guilt, but as to the justice of the punishment. Her white form falling through the darkness into the black gulf of the river constantly passed before his eyes, like a visible remorse; he asked himself if he had not gone far beyond his rights as a husband and a gentleman in inflicting a dreadful death upon a young and lovely girl standing upon the threshold of life. Guilty as Edith certainly was, she had been so bitterly punished that it made her innocent.

Any one who that morning should have told him that by night he would be a murderer would have appeared

to him a maniac; and yet he had just pitilessly destroyed a defenceless woman, whom he had sworn before God and man to protect. The terrible execution he had carried out, although justified by the laws of honour, terrified him and appeared to him in all its dread gravity. Besides, ought not his vengeance to have been vented upon Edith's accomplice? Carried away by blind wrath he had deprived himself, by slaying the culprit, of all means of ascertaining the source of the crime. It was the infamous seducer whose name he ought to have dragged from Edith, and whom he would have delighted in torturing slowly, and with most ingenious barbarity; for swift death would not have satisfied his thirst for vengeance.

Then, recalling the bonds which connected him with the mysterious association whose oath my readers have read, he grew wrathy at this setting-up of authority after years of silence; and, although the oath had not been extracted from him, he felt his independence revolted at this claim to dispose of him. He had sworn, it was true, but in the enthusiasm of youth, to serve with his whole strength and mind a common idea, but that was no reason why he should crush down the

feelings of his heart, cease to be a man, and become a reed in a hidden hand.

He seemed to note a strange coincidence between Edith's dishonour and this recalling of the oath he had taken. Was not the purpose to detach him, by this terrible blow, from human things, and to profit by his despair to launch him into an impossible enterprise?

He recalled a remark once made by one of the influential members of the association: "God put woman on the earth lest man should do too great things." By showing to him the unworthiness of the woman he loved, no doubt they had expected to convince him irrevocably of the truth of Shakespeare's maxim: "Frailty, thy name is woman," and to make him renounce forever her treacherous attraction.

"Oh!" said he to himself, "whom can I trust henceforth, if the face can lie like the lips, if candour deceives, if chastity is but a mask, if the celestial spark is but a reflection of hell, if the heart of the rose is full of poison, if the virginal wreath is placed upon hair cast loose in debauch? Edith, Edith, I had intrusted to you, fearlessly and unsuspectingly, the honour of my ancient line; I believed you would transmit pure the blood of the old knights and the royal blood of India

which flows in my veins. And yet she loved me, I am sure of it," he exclaimed, striking his knee violently with his fist; "her sweet glance told the truth; her voice had the accent of real love; there is in all this some horrible machination! On the other hand, she did not once deny the accusation; she did not utter a single word in her own defence. She is guilty, guilty, guilty," he went on, continually repeating the word with the monotonous insistence of people who feel their ideas escape them, and who cling to the last syllable they have uttered, as a saving bough clutched by their fast disappearing reason.

Tears rolled silently and uninterruptedly down his cheeks; he did not even think of wiping them away, and repeated with a crazed look, as if it were the refrain of a ballad, "She is guilty, guilty, guilty!"

Day had now come, and from the heights of Primrose Hill the eye roamed over the city of London, which was beginning to smoke like a boiling caldron; it was a grand and magnificent spectacle: long trails of bluish mists outlined the course of the Thames, and here and there arose from out the fog the pointed spires of churches, touched by slanting beams of light. The two towers of Westminster rose up almost directly

before him in the dark mist; the statue of the Duke of York stood like a little doll, upon its slender column; on the left the Monument raised to heaven its flames of gilded bronze; the Tower, its group of dungeons; St. Paul's showed its dome, flanked by two campaniles; light and shadow played over the waves of houses, — broken here and there by islets of parks or squares, — with a grandeur and majesty worthy of the ocean; but Volmerange, although his set glance seemed to contemplate this marvellous panorama with the deepest attention, actually saw nothing; the pale shadow of Edith concealed the prospect from him.

His anger was expended, and he was in such a state of prostration that a child could have mastered him at that moment; his vitality had been wholly exhausted in that vast projection; he had emptied himself into his crime. He endeavoured to rise, but his knees sank under him; his eyes clouded, his brow was covered with cold sweat, and he fell again at the foot of the tree.

At that moment there passed along the road a man of honest mien, and simple but comfortable dress; one with a face such as may be met a thousand times with-

out its being recognised, so cleverly do such men know how to wear the mask and domino of the crowd.

He approached Volmerange, who, worn out by emotion and fatigue, and chilled by the night air, was almost fainting.

"What is the matter, sir?" said the passer-by, with an air of interest. "You are very pale, and seem to be in pain."

"Oh! nothing, a passing weakness," answered the Count, almost inaudibly.

"It is a lucky chance that has brought me this way: I am a physician, and was paying a visit to one of my patients on Primrose Hill; I have some restoratives here," said the man, drawing from his pocket a small case like a surgeon's case, from which he drew a vial, apparently containing salts.

"Yes, I do not feel very well," murmured Volmerange, as his head fell.

The kindly passer-by opened the vial, from which arose a penetrating smell, and placed it under the patient's nostrils; but whatever it contained did not produce the effect which might have been expected: instead of recovering from his faint, Volmerange seemed to swoon away more completely, and the effort he had

made to breathe in the exciting odour appeared to have exhausted the little strength he had left.

The passer-by who had called himself a physician, although he saw that the patient's swoon was being prolonged, still held to his nostrils the vial, which he ought to have drawn away when he saw it did not produce the right effect. Lethargy seemed to have followed on syncope. Volmerange, his arms limp, his body sunk, his head rolling from one shoulder to the other, was now merely an inert statue.

"A capital invention," murmured the strange physician, very much satisfied with the peculiar result of his assistance. "He is now in a suitable condition; he does not know whether he is in heaven, on earth, or in hell; he can be taken and carried off without being any more aware of it than a bale of goods or a man dead for a week. We could take him to China, as he is now; but let me see if I can find a carriage in which to put him."

He sprang down to the road as if to see at a greater distance. Nor did he remain long at his position: a hackney coach, returning to London, appeared on the horizon of the road, with a flashing and a thundering of wheels.

The supposed physician made a sign to the coachman; the carriage was empty, and the coachman drew up near the bank on which lay Volmerange.

"Help me," said the false doctor, "to put this gentleman in your carriage; he took too much Spanish and French wine at supper, and fell asleep under this tree while taking his morning walk. I know him and will take him home."

The coachman helped the stranger to place Volmerange into the coach without a word, for a drunken gentleman was not so uncommon as to cause astonishment. The driver as he climbed back to his box, merely sighed in a melancholy fashion, and said to himself: "What a lucky man that lord is, to be drunk so early." And thereupon he drove in the direction indicated by the man, who had pointed out a house situated along one of the roads that succeed the streets in the suburbs of London.

After a few minutes, the carriage stopped before a wall in which was a little green door, with a brass knob shining like gold. Trees almost leafless, showing over the coping of the wall, denoted that a pretty large garden separated the house from the street.

The man who had given Volmerange the cordial

that had stupefied him, pulled the bell; he rang several times, leaving between each ring an interval which seemed to have a meaning settled upon beforehand.

A servant opened; the man whispered a few words to him; the servant went back into the house, and soon reappeared, followed by two men with olive complexions and queer faces, who took Volmerange and carried him away into a wing of round shape, which formed, at the corner of the main building, one of those towers frequently met with in English architecture.

The coachman, handsomely paid, drove away thinking the matter quite natural; he had driven back to his home more than one nobleman in a state at least as peculiar as that of Volmerange.

The man with the vial, having finished his mission, withdrew at once, after having written on a square of paper, which he tore from his note-book, a few words half in cipher, half in characters in an unknown tongue, and handed it to the servant who had opened the gate.

The house to which Volmerange had been brought, was so elegant and rich as to preclude any idea of robbery or kidnapping. A white and rose awning shaded the white marble steps; perfectly clear mirrors, placed above the chimney-places, reflected huge China

vases, filled with flowers; the glass roof and sides of a vast greenhouse, which seemed to prolong the drawing-room, rose above a regular virgin forest; Bourbon palms, bamboos, tulip trees, roseapple trees, creepers, passion flowers, shaddocks, cacti, bloomed with tropical exuberance, bristling with darts, knives, and claws, — their calyxes bursting like shells of perfume and colour, and the petals of their flowers palpitating like the wings of Cashmere butterflies.

The two dark-complexioned lackeys placed the sleeping Volmerange upon a sofa and withdrew silently, appearing in no wise surprised at the arrival of this gentleman, whom, no doubt, they then saw for the first time.

He had been resting for some little time, still under the influence of the narcotic, and yet no one appeared. The room in which he was laid presented, though furnished with elegance and simplicity, some peculiarities that might have assisted a careful observer: a fine Indian matting covered the flooring, and on the mantel was placed the figure of the Trimorti, representing Brahma, Vishnu, and Siwa; a buckler of elephant-skin, a curved sabre, a Malay creese, and two javelins were arranged in a trophy upon the wall. These char-

acteristic details, less remarkable in London than anywhere else, seemed to denote the abode of a wealthy Calcutta nabob, or of a high official of the Honourable East India Company.

Presently a brocade portière was drawn aside, and gave passage to a strange figure; it was a pale, old man, somewhat bent, who advanced leaning on a stick as white as ivory. His thin, dry, mummified face was the colour of Cordova leather or Havana tobacco; broad, dark rings circled his hollow eyes, that gleamed like those of a wild beast, and the brilliancy of which was in no wise deadened by age; his eagle nose was almost ossified, and the hardened cartilage shone like bone; his hollow cheeks, deeply wrinkled, clung to the jaws, and his lips, shrivelled by the use of betel, had turned his teeth the colour of gold. The knuckles of the hands, almost like those of an ourang-outang, were transversely wrinkled, like the insteps of hussars' boots. A small reddish wig covered his tanned head, burned and as it were calcined by the sun, and within which glowed fierce passions and the devouring fire of a fixed thought. Below the wig, sparkled two golden rings, hung from the lobe of the ears, that were like pieces of old leather.

Any one seeing that yellow, wrinkled spectre, so dry that his joints creaked as he walked, would have taken him, not for a centenarian, but for a millenarian. He looked fabulously old, and yet his eyes, the only living things in his odd face, shone like those of a youth; the whole vigour of his body, kept alive by a powerful will, had concentrated in them.

If Volmerange could have thrown off the invincible torpor that overmastered him and kept him sunk in a stupor of sleep, he would have shuddered on beholding that strange being gliding towards him like a phantom; he would have believed himself a prey to nightmare; for in spite of the full, black coat, the breeches and the silk stockings, — which a clergyman about to ascend the pulpit would not have disavowed, and which constituted a dress not entirely suited to an apparition, — the old man seemed to have arrived direct from the other world.

Yet he did not seem to be inspired by any evil feeling, and he drew near the bed with an air as plainly satisfied as his stuffed Pharaoh complexion and innumerable wrinkles, called out on his antediluvian face by his smile, were capable of assuming.

He still held in his hand the paper on which the man who had handed Volmerange over to the servant

had scribbled a few mysterious signs, and the contents were no doubt agreeable to him, for as he read it once more before throwing it into the fire, he murmured: "The fellow is very intelligent; I must remember to reward his zeal."

He then sat down near Volmerange, waiting for the effects of the narcotic to pass off; but, seeing that the young Count did not awake, he called for his dark lackeys and had him placed upon a bed in a neighbouring room.

This room, decorated and furnished with extreme magnificence, recalled the fabulous splendours of Eastern tales; there was none richer or more splendid in any palace in Hyderabad or Benares. Slender columns of white marble, up which ran vine-stalks, the leaves represented by seed emeralds, and the clusters by garnets, — supported a ceiling carved, wrought, ornamented, and divided into numerous compartments full of flowers, stars, and fantastic ornaments, as thick as a forest glade. On the walls ran a carved frieze representing the chief mysteries of Indian theogony, — a whole world of gods, with elephants' trunks and polyps' arms, holding in their hands lotus-flowers, sceptres, scourges; monsters, half man, half animal, with leafy

limbs twisted into arabesques, mystic symbols of deep cosmogonic thoughts. In spite of their hieratic stiffness and the childish artlessness of the work, these carvings had a strange, lifelike look; the complications and interlacings made them swarm before one's eyes, and imparted to them a sort of motionless action.

Broad damask portières brocaded with gold fell in heavy folds between the pillars; a thick, soft multicoloured carpet of complicated design, the palm leaves on which made it resemble a cashmere shawl woven for a giantess, covered the floor. Around the room ran a low divan, covered with one of those marvellous stuffs on which India seems to weave with silks the brilliant tints of its sky and its flowers.

A soft, milky light, passing through ground glass, illumined this Asiatic magnificence, and was made still fainter by an imperceptible cloud of bluish smoke arising from perfume-burners in the four corners of the room, — imparting to it, though it was already surprising enough, a fairylike aspect. Through this vaporous gauze the gold, the garnets, the crystals, and projecting carvings were strangely phosphorescent, and flashed with sudden gleams. A portion of the bas-relief, touched by the light, seemed to leave the pillar, to turn

on itself, and to twist into a spiral. Either the aroma of the exotic flowers springing from great vases had an intoxicating effect, or the perfume-burners contained some of those inebriating preparations of which India has the secret, and which it is accustomed to use, for in the course of a few minutes everything assumed in this hall, that resembled a pagoda, the vague and changing appearance of objects seen in dreams.

The strange personage whose appearance I have sketched reappeared after a short absence, but he had thrown off his black European clothes; a turban, artistically rolled, had replaced the red wig on his shaven skull; two white lines, drawn with consecrated powder, rayed his tawny brow; a ring of brilliants sparkled in his nose; a muslin robe fell from his shoulders to his feet in straight folds, unbroken by the body they covered, so thin was the old man. His copper face, showing between the great turban and the long white dress, produced a strange contrast; the two white lines had restored to the dark features their Indian sombreness. He looked like a devotee emerging from the caves of Elephanta, or the pagoda of Juggernaut, for the function of the car with the bloody wheels.

He stood by the bed waiting until the Count, having got rid of the narcotic, should wake from his slumbers.

Volmerange had already tried to open his eyes, and through his half-openlids had faintly caught sight of the tall pillars, the lofty ceiling of the hall, and the old Hindoo standing by him like a phantom, gazing upon him with the fixed glance of a figure in a dream; but Volmerange did not believe that what he saw was a reality; he still fancied himself wandering through the chimerical countries of sleep. To have fainted at the foot of a tree on Primrose Hill, and to recover one's senses upon a Cashmere divan in a hall of Aureng Zeb's palace, in the very depths of India, nine thousand miles from the place where one lost consciousness, is enough to astonish a brain less shaken than was Volmerange's. So he remained motionless, not knowing whether he was awake or asleep, and seeking to recover the broken thread of his thoughts. At last, making up his mind to open his eyes fully, he cast around him a look of astonishment, and could not this time refuse to believe in the existence of what he beheld.

The place in which he found himself, though very fanciful, had nothing of the architecture of dreams: it

was the hand of man, and not that of the spirits which fill sleep with impalpable wonders, that had fluted the columns, painted the ceiling, carved the *bassi-relievi;* he was not resting on a bank of clouds, but upon an unmistakable bed. He could see a huge China peony, with its scarlet bloom, in a vase of Japanese porcelain; the perfume tickled his olfactory nerves with genuine aroma. The face of the Hindoo, though worthy of a nocturnal fancy, presented shadows and lights that were quite appreciable, and the modelling was positive. There was no further reason for doubt.

Raising himself on his elbow, Volmerange put to the tall, white phantom the inevitable question in such cases, and said, like the hero of a tragedy who has recovered from his bewilderment: —

"Where am I?"

"In a place in which you are most welcome," replied the Hindoo, bowing respectfully.

At this moment the sound of bells was heard behind the curtain, the rings slid over the bars, and a third person entered the room.

XIII

A YOUNG girl of incredible beauty, wearing a rich Indian costume, appeared in the room, — appeared is the word, for she would have been taken for an Apsara, come down from Indra's court, rather than for a mere mortal.

Her complexion — a singular one according to European ideas — had the brilliancy of gold; its amber tint, like that which time has given to the flesh tints in pictures by Titian, did not prevent, however, a rosy bloom flushing the maiden's cheeks. Her almond-shaped eyes, surmounted by such clean brows that they seemed drawn with Indian ink, lengthened towards the temples, and were made longer still by a line of surmeh. The eyelids were fringed with blue lashes; the pupils shone with velvet brilliancy, and looked like two black stars on a silver sky. The nose, thin and delicately formed, with rosy nostrils, was slightly tattooed at the root, with tincture of gorothchana; and from the nostrils hung a golden ring, studded with

diamonds, through the circle of which shone purest pearls set in a smile as golden as the fruit of the jujube tree. The diamonds and pearls, mingling their gleams, imparted to the somewhat dull complexion a light which it otherwise might have lacked. The smooth cheeks, as unctuous as ivory, ran into the chin in lines of ideal purity. King Douchmonta himself, the Indian Raphael, could not have reproduced with his graceful brush all the delicacy of these contours. Behind the ears, which were small and bordered with a pearly line, like a Ceylon shell, the silky, scented bloom of a branch of siricah, fastened to a filigree knot, fell gracefully over the delicate cheek of the maiden. Her hair, the parting of which was marked by a line of carmine, was divided into bands, joined on her neck in tresses bound with gold thread, and covered with plates of jewels that stood out against its dark-blue colour. Her breasts, bound in by a narrow vest of crimson silk, so covered with ornaments that the stuff almost disappeared, were separated by a knot formed of filaments of lotus, that shone like silver threads or woven moonbeams. Her lovely arms, round and flexible as creepers, were clasped near the shoulders by bracelets in the form of serpents, like those of the god Maha-

dava, and the wrists by quintuple ropes of pearls. The palms of her hands, small as a child's, were dyed red, and diamond rings shone on every finger. A golden girdle studded with amethysts and garnets, bound her supple waist, — bare from the corset to the hip, according to Oriental fashion, — and held in the folds of trousers of striped stuff, which, fastened at the ankles, showed, emerging from a mass of pearly anklets and gilded circlets adorned with little bells, two pretty little feet with polished heels and toes laden with rings and dyed red with henna like the cheeks of a virgin blushing with shame. A scarf, with as many colours as the rainbow, or the tail of the peacock on which rides Saravasti, and the two ends of which were drawn under her golden belt, played caressingly around her undulating body, slender as the stalk of a palm. On her bosom streamed, with metallic rustlings, a cascade of necklaces of pearls of all colours, of shimmering necklets of golden balls, and lotus flowers strung in chaplets, — in a word, all that Hindoo coquetry can invent in the way of splendour and beauty; mysterious marks, made with sandal powder, showed faintly on the lower portion of her neck amid this phosphorescent brilliancy; and in order that the costumes should lack

not the least trace of local colour, the maiden breathed a faint and delightful perfume of ousire.

Neither Parvati, the spouse of Mahadava, nor Misrakesi, nor Menaca, equalled in beauty the young Hindoo maid who advanced towards Volmerange, petrified with surprise, — her necklets, her bracelets, and the bells of her anklets rustling as she walked.

The mysterious poetry of India seemed to be incorporated in that lovely girl, brilliant and sombre, delicate and wild, splendid and nude, appealing to every thought and to every sense, — to thought by her symbolical tattooing and ornaments, to the senses by her beauty, her radiance, and her perfume; gold, diamonds, pearls and flowers turned her into a focus of beams the brightest of which were those that flashed from her eyes.

She came thus to the divan with soft undulations, full of chaste voluptuousness, pressing on her heels like Sacountala on the sand of the flowery path; and when she had come opposite to Volmerange, she knelt and remained in the same attitude of respectful contemplation as Lakmi admiring Vishnu lying on his lotus leaf, and floating on the infinite, under the shadow of his serpent dais.

Although Volmerange had every reason to believe he was awake, he must have thought himself the plaything of some prodigious hallucination; there was so little connection between the events of the past night and what he now beheld that he might well have believed his brain was turned; yet nothing could be more real than the lovely being kneeling before him.

The scene deeply impressed him: his mother was a Hindoo, who belonged to one of the royal races dispossessed by the English conquest; the Asiatic blood which flowed in his veins, mingling with the colder blood of the North, seemed at this moment to run more rapidly, and to carry away with it the European portion. The remembrances of his childhood came crowding back, and he saw as in a mirage rising on the horizon, the snow crests of the Himalayas, the swelling domes of the pagodas, the orange bloom of the asoca, and the loving couples of swans floating on the blue waters of the Malini. The whole poetry of the past revived in that retrospective revelation. The architecture of the room, the perfume of the madhavi, the old Hindoo's dress, the dazzling radiance of the maiden, awoke in him forgotten remembrances; the very face

of the lovely creature, prostrate before him in an attitude of amorous adoration, was not wholly new, although he was sure he saw her for the first time. Yet where had they met? In the world of dreams, or in some anterior incarnation? He could not tell; yet a confused swarm of thoughts buzzed around his head, and he seemed to have lived a long time with her whom he had seen but for a few minutes.

The old, yellow-faced, white-robed phantom seemed to have reckoned on this effect; with strange persistency he fixed his flashing glance on Volmerange, as if to read his inmost thoughts.

Apparently the Count did not manifest his emotions strongly enough to satisfy Daksha, — for thus was the Hindoo called, — for he signed to the maiden to speak.

"My dear lord," said she, in Hindoostani speech, full of vowels and sweet as music, "have you forgotten Priyamvada?"

The sounds of the tongue he had spoken in India in his childhood, but which he had neglected since he lived in Europe, first sounded on his ears merely as a melodious, murmuring rhythm, and it took him some time to make out the meaning; he had understood the air before he grasped the words.

"Priyamvada?" he said slowly, and as if taking time to recollect, — "Priyamvada, she whose speech is sweet as honey? No, I do not remember her, and yet it seems to me — why, yes, I knew a child, a little girl —"

"The lapse of ten years has changed into a young girl the child born to your mother's sister."

"Ah! it is you, then, to whom I used to give, for playthings, little ivory elephants, tigers carved of wood, and peacocks of burned clay, painted with many colours. Priyamvada, my cousin with the golden complexion, I had somewhat forgotten our barbaric relationship."

"I had not forgotten it, and I honour in you the last line of kings whose ancestors were gods, and who were seated on the clouds before they were seated on thrones."

"Although your father was European," added Daksha, "a single drop of that divine blood transmitted by your mother makes you the heir of dynasties that lived and flourished centuries before your cold Europe had emerged from chaos or risen from the diluvian waters."

"You are the hope of a whole nation," added Pri-

yamvada, in a musical and caressing voice, with an accent of witching flattery.

"I, the hope of a whole nation? what nonsense!" replied Volmerange.

"Priyamvada has spoken the truth," went on Daksha, bowing and crossing over his bony chest his skinny hands, as black as a monkey's; "Heaven intends you for a great destiny. Touched by the sufferings of my country I devoted myself for thirty years to the most awful austerity, in order to obtain the favour of the gods; born wealthy, I have lived as the poorest pariah; I have treated this miserable body so harshly that it resembles a dried mummy which has lain for forty centuries in the mummy pits of Egypt; for I sought to destroy this weak flesh in order to allow my freed soul to ascend to the sources of things, and to read the thoughts of the gods. Oh! I have suffered much," he continued with increasing exaltation, "and I have paid dearly for the gift of sight. The rain has poured its icy torrents, and the sun its fiery waves, upon my body, which I kept motionless in the most constrained attitude. My nails have grown into my closed hands; burning with thirst, worn out by hunger, repulsive, soiled with filth, having nothing human left about me,

— I have remained for many a summer and many a winter, an object of terror and pity. The termites built their cities by my side; the birds of heaven made their nests in my brush-like hair; and the mud-caked hippopotamus rubbed against me as against a tree trunk; the tiger sharpened his claws upon my side, taking me for a stone; the children tried to drag out my eyes, when they saw them shine like pieces of crystal in the heap of inert clay that I was. The thunderbolt fell on me once, but did not interrupt my prayers. So, Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, took my penance into consideration, and the venerable Trimorti, when, my time having been served, I went to consult it in the caves of the Elephanta, deigned to tell me three times, by the mouths of its triple head, the name of the predestined Saviour."

As he spoke these strange words, Daksha seemed to be transfigured; his bowed frame was erect, his eyes glowed with enthusiasm, his brown face was lighted up, his wrinkles had almost disappeared, and the youth of the soul coming to the surface effaced for a time the decreptitude of the body.

Volmerange, surprised, listened with a sort of respectful terror, while Priyamvada, filled with admiration,

took the hem of the old man's dress and kissed it respectfully; to her, Daksha was a gouro, a divine being, and when she arose her eyes were filled with tears, like the two calixes of lotus pearly with morning dew.

They formed a charming group; the young girl with her graceful movements, her rounded forms, her sumptuous garments, presented an apparently designed contrast to this dry, angular, tall old man: they looked like the incarnation of poetry and fanaticism.

The strange scene had drawn the Count's mind from the events of the night. All that had passed in the nuptial chamber, and on Blackfriars Bridge seemed to him a feverish nightmare, driven away by the soft light of the morning. He asked himself whether he had really been married the day before, and had really hurled his guilty wife into the Thames. He could scarcely believe in the reality of the warning, the letters, the ruin of his happiness, the horrible catastrophe, and he looked dreamily at Daksha and Priyamvada.

Daksha, his excitement over, was little by little returning to commonplace life, and losing his inspired look; he was now only the parchment-like old man,

whose portrait I have already drawn; the prophet had disappeared, the man alone was left, and he said to the Count, with an obsequious smile: —

"Now that your lordship knows you are in the home of Daksha, the mouni of the Brahmin sect, I will withdraw; the ablutions I must make, to purify myself from the soil which even the saint cannot avoid in these infidel cities, compel me to withdraw to my oriental room. Priyamvada shall remain with you, and her conversation will doubtless be more agreeable than that of an old Brahmin, worn out by penance." With these words Daksha let fall the heavy portière which he had raised, and disappeared.

Priyamvada, reclining at Volmerange's feet with the grace of a tame gazelle, took his hand and looking up at him with eyes that shone in their lines of surmeh, said to him in a voice that sounded like a melodious cooing: —

"What troubles my gracious lord? He seems sad and preoccupied; is he not happy?"

For sole reply Volmerange uttered a sigh.

"Oh! no one is happy," continued Priyamvada, "in this accursed climate, in this ungrateful land, where the flowers bloom only under glass, with a stove for a

sun, where the women are pale as the snow on mountain summits and know not what love is."

This remark, which caused Volmerange's wound to bleed again, made him start painfully; his eyes flashed, and the Hindoo maid, noting the look of anger, understood she was right, and went on in her softest voice:

"Has a European woman grieved the descendant of the kings of the lunar dynasty?"

Volmerange did not reply, but his breast heaved with a deep sigh.

Her voice melting into a still softer intonation, Priyamvada continued her questions: —

"Is it possible that my lord, whose dazzling beauty surpasses that of Chandra traversing the heavens on his silver car, was not loved as soon as he deigned to cast his glance on a mere girl, — when the apsaras themselves would rejoice to serve him on bended knee?"

As she uttered these words the maid clasped her arms around Volmerange, like a pretty malica flower clinging to the trunk of the amra. Her lovely face, which she brought close to that of the Count, seemed to say, by the moist brilliance of the eyes and the grace of the smile, how completely safe from such a misfortune her European cousin would have been with her!

For sole reply Volmerange bent his head on Priyamvada's shoulder, who soon felt his tears falling.

"Can it be," said Priyamvada, wiping away with a chaste kiss the tears from Volmerange's eyes, "that this capricious woman of the North, more changeable than the fire of the opal or the chameleon skin, deceived my gracious lord, who has no equal on earth? For a man of the race of the gods weeps only when betrayed."

"Yes, Priyamvada; I have been betrayed, shamefully betrayed," cried Volmerange, unable to keep back his fatal secret any longer.

"And I hope," went on Priyamvada, in the quietest and most musical tone, "that my dear lord has slain the guilty one?"

"The Thames has concealed and punished her fault."

"That is a very gentle punishment; in my country an elephant would have trampled upon her lying bosom, and would have slowly crushed her perfidious heart; or a tiger would have torn like a gauze veil the body she had soiled with another love, — unless her master had preferred to shut up the criminal in a sack with a number of cobras. Let that remembrance fade away

from your mind like a cloudlet swept from heaven, like a flake of foam in the ocean; forget Europe, and come to India where worship awaits you; there in our burning climate, you shall breathe breezes laden with intoxicating scents; there giant flowers bend their calyxes like urns; the lotus spreads languorously upon the consecrated tirthas; in the forests and meads grow the five flowers with which Cama, the god of love, tips his arrows: the tchampaca, the amra, the kesara, the ketaca, and the bilva, — which all inflame the heart with a different but equally hot fire. The dulcet songs of the cokilas and tchavatracas sound from bank to bank; there a glance enslaves one for life; there woman loves beyond the tomb, and her passion burns out only in the ashes of the pyre. There must one live and die for a single love. Oh! come thither, master, and in Priyamvada's arms, on Priyamvada's bosom, will soon pass away, like a winter night's dream, that long Northern nightmare which you mistake for life!"

The Hindoo girl, no doubt believing herself already back in her own land, drew Volmerange to her bosom, on which shivered the golden necklets, and the pearls rustled as her quick breath made her breasts rise

and fall. Thus caught, seized by the bold, virginal caress of the girl, whose passions were as artless and chaste as those of nature in the first days of creation, — Volmerange felt deep emotion; he seemed to see waves of flame pass across his face; unconsciously his arm clasped Priyamvada's firm waist.

The portière was slightly drawn aside, and in the interstices shone the metallic eyes of the old Brahmin; but Volmerange and Priyamvada were too much taken up with each other to notice this.

"Good," said Daksha, as he gazed; "it looks as if Europe and India were being reconciled, and Priyamvada and Volmerange proposed to wed after the gandharva mode, — a most respectable way since Manou has admitted it among his laws. Nothing could better further my plans."

He then withdrew as gently as possible.

"Will you accompany me into the Punjab?" asked Priyamvada of the count, who had just pressed his lips to her brow.

"Yes; but I still have a culprit to punish," answered Volmerange, in a tone full of fury.

"That is proper," replied the maiden; "but permit your slave to feel surprised at the fact that the man

who has offended you has not yet been destroyed by your vengeance."

"I do not know him; I have proof of the crime, but I do not know who is the criminal; the plot was wrought with infernal skill; I have no clue to help me."

"Listen to me," said Priyamvada, thoughtfully. "You Europeans, who depend on your fictitious sciences born yesterday, have ceased to live in communion with nature; you have broken the bonds that bind man to the occult powers of creation. India is the land of traditions and mysteries, its inhabitants know many secrets formerly imparted by the gods, which would amaze your incredulous wise men. Priyamvada is but a little girl whom proud English ladies would consider a savage fit only to amuse their guests; but more than once have I heard the Brahmins, seated on a gazelle skin between the four mysterious braziers, speak of the possible and the impossible. Well, I can show you the culprit, were he concealed in the uttermost ends of the earth."

XIV

PRIYAMVADA arose and fetched from a corner of the room a small Chinese lacquered table, which she placed before Volmerange, who was following her every motion with restless curiosity.

In a crystal cup full of water was a rose-lotus flower, just opened. Priyamvada took the flower and emptied the water into a Japanese vase; then she placed it on the table, after having filled it with water newly drawn from a curiously wrought and carefully closed flagon.

"This," said the young Hindoo girl, "is the mysterious water which flowed from heaven upon Mount Chimavonta; it falls from the mouth of the sacred cow, which is guided in its course by pious Bagireta; it is the sacred water of the river formerly known as the Chlialoros, which now bears the name of Ganges. I drew it as I bent over the marble steps of the Benares pagoda, while performing the prescribed formalities; it therefore possesses all its divine virtues, and our experiment is an assured success."

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She appeared to be filled with the liveliest fervour

The Count listened most attentively to Priyamvada, without understanding, however, what she proposed to do.

From a number of boxes she drew powders that she placed upon the porcelain perfume-burners at the four corners of the room; wreaths of faint, bluish vapour arose, and gave out a penetrating odour.

"Now," said Priyamvada to Volmerange, "bend over that cup, and look as attentively as you can into the water it contains, while I pronounce the magic words and call upon the mystic powers."

The scene was utterly unlike an ordinary incantation: there was no cavern, no hovel, no familiar toad, no black cat, no greasy book; but a large, splendid hall, a cup of clear water, perfumes, and a lovely maid. There was nothing very terrific about all this, yet as Volmerange bent over the cup, his heart beat quickly; the unknown is always somewhat alarming, under whatever form it presents itself.

Standing by the table, Priyamvada recited a form of incantation, in a low voice and in a tongue unknown to Volmerange; she appeared to be filled with the liveliest fervour; her eyes were raised to the ceiling, the pupils concealed under the eyelids, and only the pearly

white of the orbs showing; her bosom swelled with ardent sighs, and the fire of prayer imparted a rosy tint to the golden amber of her skin. She continued for some time, then, speaking in an intelligible language, she said, as if addressing beings visible to her alone: —

"Come, Red and Gold, do your duty."

Volmerange, who up to this time had been bending over the cup without perceiving anything else than the pure water, suddenly saw its limpidity clouded by a milky tint, as if smoke were ascending from the bottom.

"Has a cloud appeared?" asked the young Hindoo girl.

"Yes, one would say that an invisible hand had poured some essence in the water, for it has suddenly turned a milky white."

"It is the hand of the spirit troubling the water," answered Priyamvada, quietly.

The Count could not help looking up.

"Do not look beyond the table," cried Priyamvada, in a beseeching tone; "you would break the spell."

Obeying the injunction of his dark cousin, Volmerange again bent his head.

"Now what do you see?"

"A circle of colour is forming at the bottom of the cup."

"Only one?"

"No, it is now double, and has all the colours of the prism."

"Two is not enough, — three are needed, one for Brahma, one for Vishnu, and one for Siva; look very carefully, I shall repeat the incantation," said Priyamvada, reassuming her curious attitude.

The third circle appeared, at first faint and pale, like the shadow of a rainbow seen by the side of the true one; soon, however, its outline became clear, and shone radiant and brilliant by the others.

"There are now three circles!" cried the Count, who in spite of his European incredulity, could not help being astonished at the appearance of the flaming rings, unexplained by any physical reason.

"The three rings are there," said Priyamvada; "the frame is ready. Spirits, bring him we wish to see. In whatever part of the world, and at whatever time he lived, were it before Adam, who is buried in the isle of Serendib, compel him to appear and to reveal himself, — a shadow if he be dead, a portrait if he be living."

These words, uttered in the most solemn tone, caused Volmerange to bend more eagerly over the cup; could he trust the efficacy of Priyamvada's magic incantations? His prejudices as a civilized man revolted at the thought, yet the effects she had already produced scarcely allowed of incredulity; in any case, his uncertainty would not last long.

At the bottom of the cup, within the space circumscribed by the three luminous rings, Volmerange saw, appearing in the depths of a vast distance, a point which approached rapidly, becoming clearer and clearer.

"Do you see anything appear?" asked Priyamvada of Volmerange.

"A man whose features I cannot yet make out is approaching towards me."

"When you see him more distinctly, endeavour to fix his features carefully in your mind, for I cannot twice bring up the spectre of the same person," added the young girl, gravely. The figure now became more defined, as if produced under the water by a mysterious brush. A flash passed through the cup, and Volmerange recognized unmistakably Xavier's pale, delicate face.

He uttered a cry of astonishment and rage; the milky cloud again filled the cup, the image became faint, and everything disappeared.

"Dolfos, one of the members of our Junta!" went on Volmerange, thunder-struck.

Dolfos was Xavier's true name, though it was under the latter pseudonym alone that Edith knew him. Xavier, or more properly Dolfos, could not have foreseen these hydromancist performances, and had thought by changing his name he could make darker still the sombre intrigue he had wrought.

Priyamvada, who appeared in no way surprised at the amazing result, poured back the Ganges water into the flagon from which she had drawn it.

"Now my dear lord may be avenged if he pleases," said the maiden; "my art has shown him the culprit."

"Listen, Priyamvada," roared the Count, as he drew himself up to his full height; "I shall follow you to India, and do whatever you please; my heart and my arm belong to you, in return for the service you have just rendered me. Now let me go. I can think of nothing but my vengeance."

"Go," replied Priyamvada; "be dread as Durga when he plunges his trident into the heart of vice, fierce as

Narsingha, the man lion, when he tears the entrails of Hiranycasipu."

She took the Count by the hand, and led him through devious windings, to a door that opened on the street.

When she returned, Daksha, who had watched the whole scene, concealed by the curtains, was standing in the centre of the hall, his chin in his hand, and his elbow resting in the other, in a meditative attitude. After a few moments he said to Priyamvada: —

"I think, maiden, you were wrong to let the dear lord go: suppose he should not come back?"

"He will come back," replied the girl, a smile full of witching and artless coquetry showing behind her diamond-studded nose-ring.

When Volmerange found himself in the street, he thought he must have been the plaything of a dream; how could he believe in such phantasmagoria? Was Dolfos really the culprit? A secret instinct convinced him that he was, although he had nothing else on which to base his belief.

But supposing he were guilty, how was Volmerange to prove it? The only creature who could have told the truth was now being carried out to sea, or at least so thought the Count, in the turbid waters of the

Thames. Again, where could he find Dolfos, whom he had lost sight of for two or three years, and whose manner of life he knew nothing of, for the man's cold and secret nature had always aroused Volmerange's antipathy. They had occasionally met, but had confined themselves to that strict politeness which borders on insult. Some love affairs in which Dolfos had been an unsuccessful rival of Volmerange, appeared to have left in his soul a deep rancour, which he carefully concealed, but which had awakened every evil feeling in his vile heart.

A further uncertainty tortured the Count: possibly Dolfos had acted in accordance with the orders of the Junta, and then, backed by the powerful association, he might escape his well-merited chastisement; no doubt some ship was already carrying him away towards an unknown country, and concealing him forever from his pursuer.

He had got so far in his reasoning, when suddenly, by one of those chances which are true in life though improbable in a novel, Dolfos, turning the corner of the street, found himself face to face with him.

At the sight of Volmerange, Dolfos understood that he knew all; he was terror-struck at the sight of

the livid face, in which flamed two glaring eyes, and threw himself back abruptly; but the Count's hand clutched his arm like a grappling-iron, and held him back.

"Dolfos," said the Count, "I know everything; do not attempt to lie; you belong to me, follow me."

The wretch tried to escape from the grasp of the strong hand, but failed.

"Shall I have to strike you in the open street, like the coward you are, to compel you to fight?" went on Volmerange; "I have the right to kill you, and yet I shall risk my life against yours, as if you were an honourable man. I can understand a man seducing a woman, for love excuses everything; but there is nothing more monstrous and abominable in hell than to ruin her coolly and hatefully: you have made me a murderer, and I now must kill you, — I owe it to Edith's memory."

"Very well, I shall follow you," replied Dolfos; "but let go my wrist, you are breaking it."

"No," replied Volmerange, "you would run away."

The Count called a passing carriage and made the pale and trembling Dolfos enter it before him

"Drive to ——," said the Count. It was a little

country-house, a cottage which he owned in the neighbourhood of Richmond.

Although the drive was rapid, it seemed long to the two enemies. Dolfos, cowering in a corner of the carriage, looked like a hyena driven to bay by a lion, while Volmerange watched him with sinister feelings. Volmerange was calm, Dolfos perturbed.

The cottage was at last reached; an old servant was in charge of the house, to which the Count rarely repaired with his friends, when he gave a bachelor party.

The cottage was planned discreetly: no one could look into the grounds, surrounded by high palings; there was no importunate neighbour; neither the breathings of love nor the yells of an orgy would awake any one's attention; on the other hand, two men might kill each other there quite comfortably. To one who had voluptuous intentions it was a Calypso's grotto; with sinister ones it became the cave of Cacus. I hope all this mythology will be forgiven me. Volmerange's intentions were not pleasant; hence the cottage became a cut-throat place.

Day was sinking, and the room into which Volmerange entered, driving Dolfos before him, was damp

and cold like a chamber in a tomb; it had not been opened for a long time.

Dolfos let himself fall into an arm-chair, and leaned his head on his hand; he was terribly cast down; although boldly imaginative, he lacked physical courage; he began to repent, as is the habit of cowards when found out. Although he had received orders from the Junta to keep Volmerange and Edith apart, he had unquestionably overstepped his powers in a most audacious fashion, and indulged too largely his own private hatred; he experienced the bitter, hopeless regret of unsuccessful rascality.

"Daniel, take that letter to the city," said Volmerange, after having folded the paper, to the old man whom he had called in; "it is in a great hurry."

The old servant went off, and when Volmerange heard the entrance door close, he said to Dolfos: —

"Now we can have it out together."

Then, livid as a spectre, his teeth set, his eyes bloodshot, he took from a trophy suspended from the wall, two swords of equal length, put them under his arm, and started for the garden; Dolfos followed him mechanically, as a criminal follows the executioner; he tried to scream, but his voice stuck in his dry throat;

besides, no one would have heard. He wanted to stop, to grovel on the ground, to resist passively; but he knew Volmerange would drive him or drag him along with his powerful hand, like a hook dragging a body to the charnel pit. So Dolfos, usually so eloquent and so crafty, walked on, mute and stupefied, for he had at once felt that prayer and falsehood were equally useless.

As they passed before a rustic hut, Volmerange entered it for a moment, and returned with a spade.

This ominous action made the blood of Dolfos run colder still. The pair thus proceeded to the very end of the grounds.

Once there, Volmerange stopped and said: —

"This place will do."

It was indeed very well arranged. The trees, which autumn had stripped of their leaves, and whose black limbs stood out against the crimson clouds of evening, formed at this place a sort of circle, apparently designed expressly for a duelling ground.

The Count, placing the two swords beyond the reach of Dolfos, took the spade and drew on the sand a parallelogram about as long as a man lying down; then he began to dig, throwing the earth to right and

left. Stiff with terror, Dolfos leaned against the tree, and in a faint voice said to Volmerange: —

"In God's name, what are you doing?"

"What am I doing?" answered Volmerange, without stopping his work; "I am digging your grave or mine, as it may chance, — the survivor will bury the other."

"That is horrible!" groaned Dolfos.

"I do not think so," went on Volmerange, with cruel irony; "I do not suppose that we intend to scratch each other merely. What I am doing is convenient and decent. However, you dig in your turn," he added, emerging from the half-made grave; "it is not right that I alone should tire myself out. We must both make the bed in which one of us is to lie."

So saying, he handed the spade to Dolfos, who, trembling all over, made five or six attempts to dig, but succeeded in removing only a small quantity of earth.

"Come, let me finish," said Volmerange, taking the spade back; "though you are such a good actor, you would not do for the part of the grave-digger in 'Hamlet,' — you dig badly, my master."

The night had almost fallen when the Count had finished his dreadful work.

"Come, that is dug deep enough. Now for the swords," said the Count, throwing one to Dolfos and keeping the other.

"There is no more light," cried the wretch; "are we to slay each other in the dark?"

"There is always light enough to kill each other; passing from life to death is an easy transition. Dark as it may be, we can always feel a sword penetrating our bodies," said the Count, lunging fiercely at Dolfos, who uttered a groan.

"I have hit you," said the Count, "for the point of my sword is wet."

Dolfos immediately lunged hard at the Count.

Volmerange parried the thrust by a prompt retreat, and binding his adversary's sword with his own, made it fly from his hands.

Seeing himself lost, Dolfos threw himself on the ground, crouched like a tiger, seized Volmerange round the legs, and made him fall.

Then began a dreadful struggle; bound by the mad grasp of Dolfos, whom cowardice and despair turned into a raging wild beast, Volmerange was unable to use

his sword; he had tried to thrust it into Dolfos' back, even at the risk of running it through his own heart after piercing his adversary, but he could not manage it, and the sword escaped him. With his hand now free, he seized his enemy by the throat.

The two adversaries had fallen near the open grave; as they rolled on the ground in that cannibal-like struggle, their turnings and twistings brought them near the open grave, into which they rolled, without letting go, pell-mell with the fallen earth. Only, Dolfos was underneath. Volmerange's fingers sank deep into his flesh and strangled him like a Spanish garrote; the wretch foamed at the mouth, a low rattling was heard in his throat, his limbs stiffened; soon the convulsions ceased, and Volmerange, freeing himself from the dead man's grasp, sprang out of the grave, saying: —

"A very obliging corpse — he has buried himself."

Taking the spade he hastily covered up the body, smoothed the ground carefully, and trampled it down.

"Now that I have settled this matter, let me return to Priyamvada, and together we will forsake this old Europe, where I leave two dead bodies."

XV

WE left the "Lovely Jenny" issuing from the Thames into the open. Probably the captain did not know whither they were bound, for when the great waves of the open sea began to lave the bulwarks of the ship, he respectfully asked Sidney, who, sunk in thought, was seated upon a coil of rope: —

"Where are we going to, sir?"

"You will find out when we get there, my dear Captain Peppercull."

"Oh! I did not ask through curiosity," answered the latter, "but the wheelman has to know whether to put the helm to port or starboard."

"That is right," answered Sir Arthur Sidney, with a faint smile, though he still named no course.

"The wind," went on Peppercull, "has hauled since yesterday; it is fair for a clear course down Channel and out into the Atlantic; but if you happen to have business in the Baltic or the Arctic, why, by beating to windward we can manage to get there."

"Since the wind is taking us down Channel," said Sidney, with an air of carelessness admirably assumed if it was not genuine, "let us go where the wind takes us."

The captain at once gave orders to have the "Lovely Jenny" kept away; in a twinkling the yards were hauled, and the ship, with a strong and steady free wind, dashed rapidly on between two lines of foam.

Seeing that Sidney kept silence, Peppercull did not think fit to attempt to enter into conversation, and respectfully withdrew some distance away.

Sidney called Jack, Macgill's friend, who was busy splicing a rope.

"Show to my cabin the woman we picked up last night."

"I shall bring her to your lordship," said Jack, disappearing down the hatchway like an opera demon down a trap-door.

While Jack fetched Edith, — who was lying in a hammock between decks, — Sidney, his brow darkened by deep thought, proceeded to his cabin to meet the young woman.

But when the cabin door opened, it was not the drowning woman whose white form had flashed through the darkness that appeared, but a slender young fellow

of medium stature, wearing a sailor's jersey and oil-skin coat; the delicate, regular features of his oval face were extraordinarily pale; the sunken eyes shone with the light of fever, and the colourless lips were scarcely distinguishable from the rest of the skin; shame mingled with his sadness, and when Sidney looked at him, a faint blush rose to his cheeks.

Sidney's glance betrayed his astonishment at seeing a sailor lad when he expected a woman, but Jack, coming up behind the supposed youth, understood his chief's surprise and put an end to it.

"When we drew the lady from the water, sir, she had on nothing but a muslin wrapper, and as we did not happen to have a woman's dress on board, I put by her hammock that red jersey and the oil-skin coat; that is how the lady we picked up turns out to be a handsome sailor lad."

"That will do, Jack; leave us," said Sir Arthur Sidney, with a gesture of command.

Sidney, left alone with Edith, fixed upon her a scrutinising glance, as piercing as that of an eagle; it was less a glance than a luminous beam that seemed to seek within the head and the heart the thought in the brain and the feeling in the bosom.

Edith remained impassible during this examination, which was no doubt favourable to her, for Sidney rose with as much respectful politeness as if he had been in a drawing-room, took her by the tips of the fingers, and said, as he led her to a sofa, provided with cushions, that stood in the corner of the cabin : —

" I beg you will sit down, madam ; you appear weak and ill, and any one who has not yet got his sea legs finds it difficult to stand."

The fact is the " Lovely Jenny," going free, plunged into the sea like a spirited horse, and the level of the floor changed constantly.

Led by Sidney, Edith let herself fall rather than she sat down upon the sofa.

There was a moment's silence, which Sidney broke with his harmonious, calm voice, made softer still by an accent of pity.

" I will not ask you, madam, whether it was crime or despair that cast you into the Thames on that dreadful stormy night. By a miracle there passed near you a boat filled with people hastening in the darkness to perform a mysterious work. You fell from heaven into that secret ; by a most unexpected chance you upset the best-laid precautions, which no one should

have seen, and no one must tell of. A blow from an oar would have hurled you back into the water — my men awaited but a sign from me."

"Then why did you not make it?" interrupted Edith, putting her diaphanous hands to her reddened eyes.

"I did not do it," continued Sidney, "for something called out to me; it seemed to me that to give back to death a being whom a marvellous chance was keeping alive, would have been cold barbarity, a sort of impiety towards fate. But I am bound to tell you that the life I give you back, I cannot give you the free use of, — not at least, until the great work in which I am engaged has been finished. The vessel on which we are will not stop before it has reached the most distant seas; until that time comes, you must be dead to the world."

"You need not fear, sir; I have no desire to come back to life."

"The costume you have put on," continued Sidney, "you shall keep for some time. Later, I shall tell you when to change it. You need have no fear; in spite of our sinister and gloomy appearance, we are honest men, working for a great end."

As he uttered these words, Sidney's eyes lighted up, his brow became radiant, his whole face was illumined;

but soon, as if ashamed of this effusion, he resumed his cool look and his cold attitude.

"You may trust to my honour, madam; I have not saved you from death to devote you to infamy; since murder or suicide threw you into the river, you must emerge from it radiant and pardoned; with me danger becomes glorious, and if you die in the fulfilment of the work we are engaged in, future ages will bless your name."

"Oh! yes," answered Edith; "now that every tie which connected me with life is broken, I feel I can live for devotion only; my life is over; I have neither end, hope, nor reason for living; everything is impossible to me, even death, since God suspended me over the abyss without letting me sink into it. Do as you please with your handmaid; let your will be mine; let your soul take the place of my empty heart; be my thought; I forswear myself from this day, and forget who I am; I shall forget even my own name, and take the one you shall give me; a phantom may be baptised at will; I shall stand and go on until the day when you shall say to me: 'Spectre, I need thee no longer; lie down again in thy tomb.'"

"I accept you," said Sir Arthur Sidney, in an almost

solemn and religious tone; "and since, poor broken young soul, you give yourself unreservedly, and devote yourself to our task with ardour and faith, I promise you, if not happiness, at least rest. Henceforth you shall inhabit this little room by my cabin, and in the eyes of the crew, which has not seen you in your woman's dress, you shall pass for my cabin boy."

Edith was installed in the small cabin; her duties, more apparent than real, were limited to fetching a book for Sidney, or bringing him his spy-glass; the rest of the time, leaning on the rail or perched in the top, she let her glance wander over the clouds and the ocean, which seemed small to her by the side of her grief. The vessel sailed on, enclosed within that brazen circle which the horizon at sea traces around ships; the sun rose and set; the white horses shook their foaming manes; the dolphins played in the ship's wake like tritons and sirens; from time to time a grey streak, bordered with foam, shone far away to port, looking like a cloud-bank coloured by a sunbeam; albatrosses, sleeping in their flight, soared above the masts or skimmed the waves, one wing in the water, the other in the air; the farther the ship pro-

ceeded, the brighter became the sky, as the Northern fogs were left behind like vanishing spectres.

But soon everything disappeared, — the birds and the outlines of the distant shores; and nothing was visible but the sea and the sky in their monotonous grandeur and sterile agitation. The Venetian song says, with wondrous melancholy, that it is sad to go to sea without love: it is both true and beautiful, for love alone can fill the infinite; but no doubt the song did not mean a hopeless, broken love, like that of Edith for Volmerange. Deep sadness filled the poor girl's heart; she could not help thinking of the happy life she might have led, for which God and society had meant her, and which a complication of wicked intrigues had made impossible; she thought of Lord and Lady Harley, and the dreadful despair of her noble father and kind mother; the tears flowed silently down her beautiful pale face, more bitter than the ocean into which they fell.

By a strange contradiction, which will not astonish women, she loved Volmerange more than ever since that terrible night; his fierce violence proved the greatness of his love; his implacable rigour pleased her; had he been more indulgent she would have thought him cold; a man must love madly when he believes he has

the right to slay. What hopes of happiness must Volmerange have entertained, since he could not bear their being swept away! What was he doing now, desperate, filled with remorse, no doubt compelled to flee? What effect had the sinister and mysterious catastrophe produced in society? Such were the questions, ever the same, and answered in a hundred ways, which Edith asked herself as the "Lovely Jenny," sometimes driven by a strong breeze, sometimes coaxing into her sails the faintest of airs, proceeded towards her mysterious destination.

Benedict, on his part, thought a great deal of Miss Annabel, and every time he passed Edith on deck, the two looked sadly at each other, for each knew the other was in grief.

At last Madeira hove in sight. Sidney sent a boat ashore to renew his supplies, and to purchase a complete outfit for Edith, — gowns, linen, shawl, bonnets, — nothing was lacking; it was like a bridal trousseau. Yet she was not permitted to leave off her sailor-boy's dress.

Whether Benedict had thought it his duty to obey the oath which he had once taken, or whether Sidney had really converted him to his views, — he had ceased

to rebel against the strange kidnapping which had snatched him away so suddenly from happiness, and did not seem to bear any grudge against his friend.

They would spend long days in the cabin, leaning on the swinging table, covered with papers and mathematical instruments. Sir Arthur Sidney, after long meditation, would draw on a slip of paper complicated designs covered with algebraic signs and reference letters, which Benedict carefully copied in ink with the greatest possible accuracy; sometimes before he copied them he would make remarks, to which Sidney listened with deep attention, and which occasionally brought about some change in the original plan.

Soon the two friends passed from the drawing of plans to the making of a model on a small scale; they gravely cut small pieces of wood, as long as a finger, the use of which it would have been difficult to guess. When they were all cut Sidney put together very skilfully the separate numbered pieces which Benedict handed him, the latter appearing to take an equally lively interest in the work. After a month of this constant labour they turned out a boat one foot long, externally exactly like those which compose the flotillas that children sail on the basins of the parks or the

royal gardens, — but internally it was filled with wheels, tubes, and bulkheads.

The result, though apparently puerile, seemed to delight the two friends greatly; Sidney uttered a cry of satisfaction as he fixed the last board.

"I think we have succeeded," said he, "at least as much as we may be certain of in theory."

"We must test it," answered Arundel.

"Nothing is easier," replied Sidney, ringing a bell placed near him.

Emerging from the forecastle, where he was busy with a friend, in making a comparative study of the specific strength of rum, Jack presently appeared and waited, twisting his hat between his fingers, for Sir Arthur's orders.

"Bring me a tub full of water," said Sidney to Jack, who, surprised at the strange order, asked to have it repeated.

"Your honour said a tub full of water?"

"Yes, what is there surprising in that?" answered Sidney.

"Nothing, sir; I had not heard you correctly," answered Jack. "I will fetch it at once."

A few minutes later he reappeared with his friend

Macgill carrying between them the tub full of water, which they carefully placed at the entrance of the cabin.

When the two sailors had gone, Sidney carefully took the little boat and placed it in the water as seriously as a child launching a ship of war in a basin.

But curiously enough, the boat, instead of floating, as might have been expected, gradually sank and disappeared under the water in the tub; a performance that appeared to give great satisfaction to both Sidney and Benedict, — though boats are not usually built to sink.

Sidney, who noticed with enthusiasm that the little boat had not sunk to the bottom, cried out: —

"Look, Benedict, it keeps just at the right depth. My calculations were correct; now I am sure of everything."

His eyes flashed, and his nostrils dilated with noble pride; but soon recovering his customary coolness, he pulled up his sleeve, plunged his bare arm into the water, drew out the little boat, and carefully locked it up after drying it. Benedict also seemed very much pleased at the success of the operation, and from that day a ray of hope lightened his sadness.

As for poor Edith, who was not in the secret of the craft, her melancholy had turned into a dull resignation; as I have said, she had no other distraction than the prospect of ocean.

The voyage had lasted nearly three months, and did not seem to be drawing to an end; the Canary and Cape Verde Islands had disappeared in the far distance. On passing Ascension Island Macgill and Jack were sent in the boat to the post-office cave, and found in the bottle suspended from the ceiling a roll of paper covered with enigmatical signs, which they handed to Sir Arthur Sidney.

Sir Arthur easily read the curious writing, after having placed upon it a grille which he drew from his pocket-book; he appeared satisfied with the contents of the note, for he said to Benedict: "It is all right, everything is going on satisfactorily."

A few days after they had passed Ascension Island, a small gray cloud began to rise from the sea, like a wisp of mist drawn up by the sun; soon it became somewhat denser, and its outlines showed more plainly on the clear horizon. With a telescope it could be plainly made out; it assuredly was not a cloud, but land; the island rose gradually from the waters, and,

owing to the curve of the sea, showed as yet only its mountain summits; soon, however, it was seen in its entirety, motionless and sombre, and girdled with foam, in the centre of space.

Huge precipitous rocks, two thousand feet high, overhung in volcanic masses the sea, which beat at their feet and rolled with mad anger into the caves hollowed out by its attacks; it seemed to be conscious of what it was doing, so fiercely did the billows return to the charge. The cloud-capped tops of these granite masses, shrouded at their feet by a mist of spray, were tipped with sunbeams; the gigantic steeps and bare slopes, on which the lava of extinct volcanoes ran in furrows, like the cicatrices of former wounds, the summits, worn by torrential rains, formed a picture at once majestically savage and sinister; it had a grandly horrible look. The rocks seemed to have fallen from heaven on the day the giants endeavoured to scale it; they were still shattered and burned by the thunder-bolts; evidently something superhuman was going on there, — some incredible vengeance, a torture like that of the cross of the Caucasus; involuntarily the eye sought upon the summits the colossal silhouette of a chained Prometheus. Indeed it would not have taken

much fancy to see in the wind-shaped cloud which hovered above the broken crest, like a human form, the fierce vulture itself.

In point of fact a Prometheus, as great as his prototype, was suffering there, crucified for five years past by strength and power, as in the tragedy of Aeschylus.

The whole crew was on deck. Sir Arthur Sidney gazed at the black island with an unfathomable glance of mingled shame, grief, and hope; he grasped mutely the hand of Benedict standing by him and apparently also a prey to deep emotion. Captain Peppercull had left a gallon of rum half emptied, a most striking mark of his mental perturbation.

Orders were given to cast anchor opposite the town, the grey houses of which showed within the deep ravine between the mountains, open at this place alone, for everywhere else the hills surround the island like a girdle of towers and bastions.

Edith, who had lived aboard the "Lovely Jenny" in absolute isolation, and had no knowledge of the distance traversed by the ship, moved by curiosity at the sight of land, timidly approached Sir Arthur Sidney, who, unable to detach his glance from the prospect

before him, placed his hand on her arm, for he paid no attention to her. She said to him, in a somewhat trembling voice, for she never spoke to him first:—

"What is the name of that island?"

"That island," replied Sir Arthur Sidney, in a singular tone, as he came out of his reverie, "that island is called St. Helena."

XVI

"ST. HELENA," sighed Edith, whose eyes were wet with tears.

"Yes," answered Sidney, noting with interest the effect produced on Edith by the magical name.

"Oh! what a dreadful place," continued Edith, clasping her hands.

"Dreadful, indeed," cried Sir Arthur, his eyes still fixed upon her.

"It would be cruel to take criminals to such a spot."

"Yet they have transported genius there," said Sir Benedict Arundel, taking part in the conversation.

"Shame on our nation," went on Sidney, as if to himself, and sunk in deep thought; "but patience —"

He stopped as if he were afraid of saying too much, then resumed his impassible look.

A few minutes later he ordered Captain Peppercull to get the boat ready, and returned to the cabin with Edith and Sir Benedict Arundel.

Sidney took Edith's hand, and in the presence of Benedict said to her: —

"You have given me the right to make use of your devotion and intelligence in carrying out my end; you promised to trust me blindly, and to walk with closed eyes on the road in which I shall place you, even though it should end in an abyss."

"I have said so; my life is yours," answered the young woman.

"Very good," continued Sir Arthur; "at present, however, I do not mean to make so serious a demand upon you. The time has come for you to leave off your sailor dress; go to your cabin, in which I have had put everything you will need."

Edith rose and went out.

Sir Arthur Sidney, left alone with Benedict, crossed his arms upon his breast, as if to keep down the beating of his heart; then he opened them to his friend and said to him: —

"Brother, in case we never again meet in this world, let us embrace."

Benedict advanced towards Sidney, and the two friends clasped each other for a moment.

"When everything is ready," said Sidney, drawing Benedict to the port-hole, "you will cut down that little tree which twists and blows in the wind at the

top of that black rock; it can be seen a long distance at sea. I am going to Tristan d'Acunha, or to the African coast, at the mouth of the Coanga river, it is nearer, to build the boat. It will take me two months. During these two months the 'Lovely Jenny' will cruise in these seas, and then we shall strike our great blow."

"History will be amazed at it, and never —"

He was going to say more when Edith entered. Benedict and Sidney remained astounded at her beauty; her man's dress had until then prevented both the friends — absorbed, the one by a great thought, the other by a great grief — from noting how very adorable and charming Miss Edith was.

The time that had elapsed had, if not appeased, at least softened her grief; the only traces of the horrible catastrophe were the delicate pallor of her cheeks, and a light azure tint on the temples, that brought out the distinction of her lovely face by making the soul within it in some sort visible.

She was dressed with the most charming simplicity: a gown of white India muslin, dotted with little sprays of flowers, set off her young and supple figure, and fell in abundant folds over her hips; a bonnet of fine

Manila straw, trimmed with rose-coloured ribbons, framed in the soft oval of her face; and over her shoulders was draped a China shawl.

As she caught the admiring glances of Sidney and Benedict, Miss Edith felt her pale cheeks blush; the woman was being re-born in her.

"You are lovely," Sidney could not help saying. "Now you shall leave with Benedict; you shall pass for his sister or his wife. I think his wife would be better, and that is what you shall be called. You will take a house in Jamestown, and a country-house as near Longwood as possible; later on Benedict will tell you what you have to do."

"I shall obey," replied the young woman, somewhat troubled at the thought of passing for Benedict's wife, and living alone under the same roof with a young and handsome man.

Then with the humility of a pure soul, ever unjust to itself, she said to herself that she had no right to consider the situation equivocal, and that, after all, Xavier's mistress had no right to be so very scrupulous.

"Come," said Sidney, taking Edith by the hands and leading her to Benedict, "it is time for the bride and bridegroom to go: the boat is ready alongside."

Then with his characteristically serene smile he said to his friend: —

"Confess that if I took a bride from you, I have given you back one who is no less beautiful."

Benedict turned pale at this embarrassing remark, but restrained himself, for he knew that nothing was farther from Arthur's thought than even the most innocent sarcasm; and looking at Miss Edith he could not help thinking she was in no wise inferior to Miss Annabel Vyvyan.

Edith, without being quite conscious of it, felt a certain pleasure in again wearing the dress of her sex. The white gown, the fine straw bonnet, the knots of ribbon brightened her in spite of herself; the thought of landing was pleasant. A long sea passage is so monotonous that even the most arid and inhospitable place is to be preferred to that of a ship; and for three months past Edith had seen nothing but sky and water.

When she found herself in the stern-sheets of the boat, by Sir Benedict Arundel's side, she experienced a sense of comfort and freedom, and a brighter expression illumined her lovely face, usually so melancholy.

The sea was fairly smooth, and the boat, pulled by six vigorous seamen, drew near the shore, shot alongside

the landing-place, and Benedict held out his hand to Edith to help her out. Jack and Saunders loaded on the shoulders of a pair of copper-coloured fellows the boxes, which Sir Arthur had filled with everything necessary for the installation of the young couple.

Saunders soon found a suitable house in the town, and there the young couple, after having satisfied the authorities by the exhibition of perfectly regular papers, provided by the far-sighted Sidney, settled down under the name of Mr. and Mrs. Smith.

The tale told by Jack was that Mrs. Smith, who was going to India with her husband, to visit the great indigo estates they possessed in that country, had been so tried by the sea that she had asked to rest, for a month or two, on the nearest habitable land met with, before she resumed a voyage from which she suffered so much.

That very evening Sir Arthur Sidney set sail, and the "Lovely Jenny" soon disappeared in the blue distance. Benedict, leaning at the window of his new dwelling, which looked out on the sea, followed with his eyes the vessel, that grew smaller and smaller, until a gull's wing would have sufficed to conceal it.

The house inhabited by the supposed husband and wife was exactly like a Chelsea or Ramsgate house,

thanks to the obstinacy peculiar to the English race, which neither distance nor climate can overcome. The walls were of that yellow brick which in London worries the stranger's eyes; and the internal arrangements were exactly the same as if the house were built opposite Temple Bar, or near Trinity Church. The only concession to the climate consisted of a striped blue awning, shading the entrance door, — and the substitution of Philippine mattings for woollen carpets.

In the arid, dry garden was a row of tamarisks, the delicate, verdigrised, lace-like leaves of which trembled at the least breath, and cast a slight shade upon the dusty sand, in which languished a few thirsty flowers cultivated by a Malay gardener.

Sir Benedict Arundel and Miss Edith felt very strange when they found themselves alone at table, placed, in conjugal fashion, opposite each other, and served by a silent attendant. This sudden intimacy, springing from their supposed marriage, and perfectly natural under those circumstances, amazed and frightened them, though possibly it also unconsciously pleased them. The combination of unusual events, which had brought about this impossible situation, had probably not occurred since the earth began revolving round the sun; and even now,

they had not yet fathomed its full strangeness, for Arundel and Miss Edith did not know that they were, the one a wifeless husband, the other a husbandless wife; for Benedict, drawn away by Sidney, had not entered the church of St. Margaret; and the two fair brides alone had met under the dark porch.

What they did know was that they were eight thousand miles from home, on the gloomy island of St. Helena, compelled by the remorseless working-out of a mysterious scheme to live day and night under the same roof, — both young, handsome, and loveless.

The meal over, they visited the house more carefully and saw that there was but a single bedroom. Edith, with her English modesty, blushed; Benedict stopping on the threshold, and understanding the embarrassment of his supposed wife, said: —

"I shall have a hammock hung up for myself in the upper room."

Edith, reassured, smiled gently, and threw her scarf on the bed, by way of taking possession.

Then they went down into the garden, where they walked up and down the long tamarisk walk, with the satisfaction of people who for three months have had their walks bounded by the narrow quarter-deck of a ship.

Edith's arm rested on Arundel's, for she stumbled, unaccustomed as she now was to walking; and certainly Annabel and Volmerange would have been amazed at seeing the couple traversing the solitary walk in apparent conjugal intimacy.

A few days thus passed; Edith had made up her mind to consider Benedict as a brother; on his part, Benedict accepted her as a sister; yet a greater attraction than they were aware of was drawing them towards each other.

Spending almost the whole of their days together, they ended by confiding in each other; Benedict told Edith of his love for Annabel, and the way she had been separated from him: Edith told him of her marriage in the sombre church of St. Margaret.

"What, was it your carriage that crossed mine before the portal?"

"Yes," replied Edith.

"What a strange coincidence,—the wedding which everything seemed to lead up to, did not take place; those who were to be united, were separated, and those who were separated are united; couples are made and unmade in spite of choice and will. We who are not in love with each other, for our hearts are given away,

are here in the same house, alone, free, thousands of miles from those we love and whom we shall never again see."

"That is true," replied Edith, thoughtfully; "fate has indeed strange caprices."

The supposed husband and wife henceforth had one of those convenient subjects of conversation in which a growing inclination finds a way of making indirect confessions, which may be confirmed or retracted according to whether they succeed or not. Benedict spoke of Annabel and her beauty, in words which, after all, might have applied to Edith equally well; he vented his regrets and painted his passion in the liveliest manner, and in burning language. His companion, attentive and deeply interested, listened to his passionate eloquence with the less hesitation that it was not directly intended for her.

She replied to it by protestations of love for Volmerange, whose anger she acknowledged having justly deserved, for not having been entirely frank with him. In these ambiguous conversations each showed his tenderness, his love, his capacity for devotion, and displayed fearlessly the treasures of his soul. Under the protection of the names of Annabel and Volmerange,

they indulged in subtle amorous metaphysics; their passion, unknown to themselves, and concealed behind that mask, enjoyed the freedom of a masked ball. Little by little Edith was taking Annabel's place, and Benedict that of Volmerange.

It should be said for them that they were not conscious of the change, and yielded the more willingly to the charm attracting them one to the other, because they believed it perfectly safe, and were sure they could never love each other. If Benedict had been asked whether he loved Annabel as much as ever he would have replied, "Yes," with heartfelt sincerity; and had Edith been questioned, she would also have sworn that her passion for Volmerange was in no wise diminished.

A few weeks passed by with magical swiftness. Before parting at night they would shake hands in fraternal fashion, and each withdraw to his room with a sigh and a sort of indefinable sadness. Once Benedict said laughingly to Miss Edith: —

"Mrs. Smith, I claim my rights as a husband; I should like to kiss your brow."

The young woman bent forward without a word, and offered her head submissively to Benedict's lips; the kiss lighted half upon her satin brow, half upon her

silky, scented hair. Then with a movement like a frightened doe, she abruptly returned to her room and closed the door.

That night Benedict did not sleep well.

Meanwhile, however, Sir Arthur's instructions were being literally carried out; a country-house, as near over the dwelling of the illustrious prisoner as the English allowed, had been rented, and the pretended Mrs. Smith withdrew to it, on the pretext that she lacked air in the narrow confines of Jamestown.

Benedict remained in town for some days, apparently busy with commercial affairs. Edith, accompanied by a mulatto servant, went every day, at the same hour, as Benedict had told her to do, for a walk which took her as close as possible to Longwood.

"Especially do not forget to carry or wear in your straw bonnet, a bouquet of violets," Benedict told her as he left, and as there happened to be a bed of violets in the garden of the country-house, the order was easily carried out.

For several days Edith's walk proved barren of results; the prisoner, ill and weaker, did not come out.

Impatient to learn the result of Edith's perambula-

tions, and perhaps also impelled by some other motive, Sir Benedict Arundel had joined her in the country-house, and every time she returned from her walk, he questioned her eagerly, but the reply was invariably the same, —

"I have seen nothing but the eagles soaring in the air, and the albatrosses over the waters."

Finally, one day at a turn in the road, Edith found herself face to face with the imperial captive, who seemed to walk with difficulty, followed at a distance by his trusted companions, and guarded from afar by red-coated sentinels. A marble pallor covered his thin features, which, accentuated by grief, had resumed the beautiful lines of youth.

He looked at Edith and smiling with irresistible grace, took two or three steps towards her and bowed. In presence of the fallen god, Edith, who might perhaps have preserved her self-possession in the radiant light surrounding the emperor, was troubled, turned pale, and almost fainted.

The hero advanced towards her and said to her in a grave, sombre voice, like an inhabitant of Olympus speaking to a mortal, —

"Madam, reassure yourself."

And noting the bouquet of violets she held in her hand, —

"It is long since I have seen such fresh flowers."

Mechanically Edith bowed and held them out to him.

"Their scent is sweet, but less sweet than that of the violets of France," said Cæsar, handing back the flowers to the young woman, after having breathed in their perfume. Then he bowed with noble majesty, and resumed his way.

Dazzled by this imperial vision, Edith returned to the country-house, and to Benedict's question answered, —

"At last I have seen him."

"What did he say? repeat it word for word."

"He said the scent of the violets was sweet, but less sweet than that of the violets of France. That was all."

Benedict turned pale, so deeply was he moved by these simple words. Without making any reply he took a telescope and an axe, and started for the rock on which the tree pointed out by Sir Arthur Sidney showed its contorted silhouette.

He scanned the ocean with his glass. An almost imperceptible little white dot — was it a gull or a flake of foam? — alone broke the blue solitude of ocean.

"It is well," said Benedict.

And he struck the trunk of the tree with the axe; very soon he had cut down the tree, which fell from the top of the rock into the sea, with a dull, lugubrious sound.

XVII

AT some distance from Arungabad, in India, at about the same time as these events were happening on St. Helena, silent shadows were gliding, on a moonless night, through the reeds and the jungle on the banks of the Godavari, in the direction of an old, half-ruined pagoda, formerly dedicated to Siva, but abandoned since the English conquest. Nature, emboldened by solitude, was reasserting its rights over man's handiwork; the dust collected in the hollows of the carvings, and wetted by the rains formed a loam for the seeds brought by the winds; wall plants had clung with their tendrils, their roots, and their thorns; the roots of the shrubs, forcing themselves into the cracks of the stones, had slowly separated the blocks; mangroves, favoured by the damp, multiplied their leafy arches around; the thick, luxuriant, vigorous vegetation of India was little by little concealing the monument, and turning the pyramid into a hill.

Faintly seen through the darkness, with its broken outlines and its crest of brushwood, the ruined pagoda had a formidable and monstrous aspect. The temple of the god of destruction, itself destroyed, spoke, silently, with sinister eloquence.

The main door, closed by palisades formed of boards, by fallen earth, and an inextricable interlacing of vegetation, led to the belief that the building was deserted; yet lights occasionally appeared, moving past the half-filled openings, and indicated that something was going on in the interior. The shadows I have mentioned proceeded towards one part of the wall, into which they crawled and vanished. A huge stone, which had been moved out of its place, gave ingress, and through secret passages, cut within the thickness of the walls, the centre of the pagoda was reached.

At the end of a vast hall, supported by squatty columns, circled by granite rings and wearing, like women, triple ropes of carved pearls, the capitals formed of four elephant's-heads, stood, in a niche framed in by a rich border of arabesques, the statue of the god Siva,—a very old idol, rendered still more terrible by its archaic form. It breathed anger and vengeance; in two of its four arms it held a whip and a

trident, and a collar of death's-heads fell upon its breast; by its side Durga, its hideous spouse, rolled her cross eyes, gnashed her hippopotamus teeth, and stretched out her hands provided with claws, and while twisting her body, bound with serpents, crushed the monster Mahishasura, which tried to enfold her in its loathsome clasp.

Set within the walls, innumerable horrible figures, symbols of struggle or destruction, grimaced at the spectator; here the monstrous Mana-Pralaya, with a beast's-head, swallowing a whole city in his enormous mouth; there, Arddha-Nari, with a chaplet of skulls and chains, fiercely brandishing a sword; elsewhere Maha-Kali, holding in each of his four hands a head cut off; Mahadeva, with a river flowing from his brain, and bracelets made of vipers, was struggling with the deformed Tripurasura, while Garuda beat its wings, and sharpened its parrot-like beak and its eagle's-talons.

This was all that could be made out by the light of the lamp hanging before the statue of Siva; in the depths of the hall, filled with ruddy shadows, the eye could only make out, beyond the circle of light, vague forms, inexplicable interlacings, a hideous mingling of legs, dragon's-heads, and monsters of all kinds.

Within the circle of light, were grouped on tiger or gazelle skins, extraordinary and fantastic-looking beings, whose white eyebrows and beards brought out strikingly their dark complexions. The Brahmin cord hanging around their necks marked their caste; some of the more austere wore in lieu of it a serpent's-skin; all were ascetically lean, — through their open tunics could be seen their dried breasts, with their ribs protruding like those of a skeleton. They remained motionless, muttering prayers, and appeared to be awaiting, with Hindoo phlegm, some important personage who had not arrived.

Behind them was a confused, copper-coloured crowd, the first rows of which alone were visible in the faint red light of the lamp; the rest were speedily lost in the shadows. From time to time a new-comer disappeared silently in some group.

At last there was a stir; the crowd opened up, and soon appeared on the spot where the light of the lamp shone most brilliantly, three new-comers, whose arrival was received with murmurs of satisfaction. The one was an old Brahmin, as dried up and yellow as a mummy, with inspired, flaming eyes, wearing a muslin robe down to his heels. The second was a young

girl, as beautiful as Sakountala or Vasatensena; a transparent veil half concealed her rich costume, the embroideries and spangles of which sparkled through the gauze; as she walked, her necklets, her bracelets and anklets rattled with metallic sound. The third was a handsome young man, fairer than the girl, whose eyes were peculiar in being dark-blue; he wore a Mahratta warrior's dress, but much richer and more ornamented; a steel coat-of-mail protected his breast and fell to the bottom of his yellow tunic; full red trousers, caught at the ankles, and a muslin turban rolled around a steel helmet completed his dress. He wore golden bracelets, a curved sabre with velvet sheath, enriched with gold and precious stones. On his left arm he carried a buckler of hippopotamus-skin, studded with metal bosses; in his right hand he held a long musket, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and silver.

The old Brahmin was, as the reader has no doubt guessed, the same Daksha whose acquaintance we made in London; the lady was unaccountably like Priyamvada, and as for the Mahratta warrior, his features and his blue eyes proved him, in spite of his disguise, to be Volmerange, the European, a member of many clubs

in London, a descendant of the kings of the Lunar dynasty.

Daksha advanced towards the three leanest and most dried up Brahmins, and taking Volmerange by the hand, led him under the lamp, the light of which formed a sort of halo around his head, and presented him to the personages who appeared to be the most prominent in the assembly.

"He has the look of a Pradjati," murmured the spectators, delighted with Volmerange's fine appearance; "he looks like one of the first ten creatures that issued from the hands of Brahma."

Volmerange was indeed very handsome in his singular and picturesque costume.

"Sarngarava, Saradouata, and you, Canoua," said the old Brahmin, "I have brought him of whom I spoke, the descendant of the Douchmantas and Barahtas. He alone — so the gods, touched by my long penance, have revealed to me — he alone can bring back the former splendour of our land; he it is who shall drive away the coarse barbarians, — Englishmen who profane the waters of the Ganges, speak to pariahs, prevent widows from burning themselves alive as decency requires, who make their belly the tool of their life, and — a piece

of monstrosity that calls for vengeance, an abominable impiety — who dare to feed on the sacred flesh of the ox and the cow."

This last remark caused a thrill of horror to run through the assembly; the Brahmins raised their eyes to the ceiling, and a low muttering of imprecations sounded in the dark depths of the pagoda. The gods of granite, partially lighted by the quivering gleams of the lamp, seemed to frown and move on their pedestals.

"Is everything ready for the revolt?" asked Daksha; "are the weapons, horses, and elephants collected?"

"The crypts of the pagoda, the existence of which is unknown to any one outside our sacred college, are filled with muskets, lances, and arrows; the Mahratta chiefs, who are not as well tamed as the European barbarians imagine, have furnished us with horses; fifty trained war elephants with their howdahs, camped in the centre of a forest impenetrable to any who are not acquainted with its recesses, are awaiting the signal," answered Sarngarava; "the province will rise like one man."

"Oh! venerable Trimourti, Vishnu, Brahma, and Siva, thanks be to thee for allowing me to live until

this day, old and broken though I am," said Daksha, whose withered hands shook with pleasure. "We shall succeed, I am certain of it; the celestial powers will assist our enterprise; Brahma reveals the future to me; the god of war, in his last avatar, has assumed the human form, and comes to our help from the West, riding on a divine eagle, greater and stronger than the bird Garuda, which holds the lightning in its talons, and with its iron beak slays the battalions overthrown by the wind of its wings; that god shall shoot seven arrows at the English, who will flee terrified, and we shall become masters of the seven douipas, of which the world consists, as may be seen in the holy book of the Pouranas."

This curious address, delivered with an accent of deep conviction, produced a great effect upon the assembly. Priyamvada in particular, was delighted, and thought she already saw arriving the marvellous bird, bearing the hero seated upon its back.

"Barahta, we shall set thee again on the throne of thy ancestors," said Saradouata, "swear to fight with us to your last breath, and if you are successful to stay everywhere the slaying of the sacred animals."

"I swear it," replied Volmerange, in Hindoostanee.

"It is well," said the Brahmin Sarngarava. "And now, people, listen. He who stands before you is Barahta, a descendant of Douchmanta, the most glorious and most famous king, the conqueror and tamer, who lived familiarly with Aditi and Casyapa; devote yourselves to him, follow him and obey him to the death; if you are slain while carrying out his orders, you will return to Pantchatouam, — you will return into the elements, without the atoms of which you are composed suffering; and after your soul has been purified in lovely bodies, and is judged worthy of Moucti, it will be absorbed in the Divinity. Now disperse, and be to-day at the place of meeting."

The crowd vanished as if by magic; the Brahmins re-entered the walls through the secret passages, and no one was left in the hall but Daksha, Priyamvada, and Volmerange.

"Would you prefer to spend the remaining portion of the night here," said the old Brahmin to Volmerange, "or set out for the mountain camp?"

"Let us go," cried Volmerange. "This old cave, with its grimacing monsters, is not comfortable. Give me your hand, Priyamvada, for the devil take me if

I can walk without stumbling through these dark passages."

After having groped for some time through the labyrinth of passages, which Priyamvada and the old Brahmin appeared to be well acquainted with, they reached an opening, and it was not without secret satisfaction that Volmerange again breathed the open air. The performance which had just taken place, so full of meaning for the spectators, so ridiculous in his opinion, had wearied him; he found it difficult to look upon himself seriously as a prince of the Lunar dynasty, and but for Priyamvada, his lovely friend with the golden complexion, he would most willingly have given up his throne.

The elephant that had brought the trio was still waiting patiently under guard of its keeper, plucking at the foliage with its trunk and slowly swallowing the leaves, rather by way of filling up the time than because it was hungry. With characteristic intelligence, on hearing the steps of its master, it bent its pillar-like legs and knelt down.

Priyamvada and Daksha climbed to the shoulders of the colossal animal with the ease of people accustomed to that kind of mount. Volmerange was not quite so

skilful, and the young Hindoo girl had to hold out her hand to help him. In his education as a sportsman, which had been very thorough, my hero had not given a thought to this kind of riding.

The keeper, crouching on the skull of the huge animal, drove in his anker, and the elephant started off at a rhythmic trot or amble, the steadiness of which would have worn down the fastest running horse. From time to time it stretched out its trunk, and broke a creeper or branch which was in the way, or if the path was too narrow it leaned against the obstructing tree and broke it down; at other times it trampled over the bamboos, that broke with a snap or bent like grass.

Priyamvada, lying in the howdah placed upon the animal's back, had fallen asleep on Volmerange's breast; as he was much taller than she, she looked like one of those dainty statues of goddesses which the gods hold in their arms: like Parvata on Mahadeva's bosom, Lakshmi on Vishnu's, and Saravasti on Brahma's. Volmerange remained motionless for fear of waking the lovely girl, and gazed upon the strange landscape outspread confusedly before him, and which assumed in the darkness most weird forms: carob

trees, fig trees, banyan trees, babobabs as old as creation, mangroves, and palms mingled their foliage, through which, as on a black spot, suddenly shone a star or a bit of the night sky.

Seated by the keeper, Daksha muttered devoutly a prayer for the success of the enterprise.

After two hours of travel, a reddish light began to gleam between the trunks of the trees, indicating the nearness of the camp where the first mutineers had already collected. The sentries, hearing the noise of the leaves and branches displaced by the elephant bearing the trio, came forward to reconnoitre, and Volmerange, Daksha, and Priyamvada entered the camp.

The sight was most strange, and took one back to the days of the wars between Darius and Alexander. A great fire of brushwood, branches, and broken trees, cast a fantastic light through the leafy vaults of the forest. Around the fire, arranged in a circle, fifty elephants, picturesquely lighted from below, stood motionless, grave, and pensive, like Ganesa, the god of wisdom; scarcely from time to time did their great ears move, and had they not occasionally lifted up their restless trunks as they scented in the distance a prowling tiger or an enemy seeking to enter the wood,

they might have been thought carved out of granite, like their stone brethren that adorn the pagodas. On their backs they bore howdahs, and their tusks were ribbed with iron to prevent their breaking in battle.

Farther off were the Mahrattas and other Hindoos, lying by their horses, and their weapons hanging near them on the trees.

Volmerange and his two friends had not yet descended from their tall mount, when a plaintive cry was heard, immediately succeeded by a tremendous shout. The elephants knelt of themselves to receive their masters; the Mahrattas sprang to their horses; every one ran to his weapons — taking up whatever came first, a musket, a lance, or a bow.

Firing broke out to the right and the left; the terrified outposts were driven back on the main body, and sepoys, supported by red-coated soldiers, were seen running from one tree to another, to take cover and aim in safety. The elephants, driven by their keepers, dashed forward in every direction, breaking down trees, and trampling under foot the enemy they met. The English, for it was they, informed by a traitor of Daksha's plans and the meeting-place of the mutineers, were arriving on all sides and surrounding the camp.

Soon the fight became concentrated upon the space where shone the great fire, and the centre of the mêlée was where stood Volmerange, Daksha, and Priyamvada; by the fierceness with which this point was defended, the assailants understood that there must be the most important personages. Eight or ten Mahrattas, who had climbed on top of Volmerange's elephant, kept up a continual fire; Volmerange himself, helped by Priyamvada, who loaded his musket, shot down an Englishman every time; his valiant steed, taking part in the combat, uttered furious screams, seizing sometimes a man, sometimes a horse in his trunk, and throwing him into the air, or else, bending forward, crushed a whole squad of the enemy against the wall of rock. Bullets rattled on its hide like hail, without other result than making its ears bleed, as if it were tormented by flies. As for Daksha, he held in his hand a sprig of the sacred plant cousa, which he kept rubbing between his fingers, while murmuring the ineffable syllable *om*. The confusion became inexpressible; muskets exploded, arrows hissed, horses neighed, elephants screamed and trumpeted, the wounded groaned, and the smoke, kept in by the leafy vault, formed a heavy pall over the combat.

A group of Englishmen, braver and more resolute than the rest, attempted to scale Volmerange's elephant, but the intelligent animal, backing up against a monstrous babobab, used its trunk like a flail, and struck them down half dead from the horrible blows dealt at their heads; those who escaped the trunk fell under the bullets of Volmerange and the Mahrattas.

The struggle could not last long. Priyamvada, who was loading Volmerange's musket, was struck in the breast; she did not utter a single cry, but the red foam rising to her lips, marked her last kiss on Volmerange's hand, which she took and had just strength to bear to her lips, after having held out to him his second loaded musket. Volmerange fired and killed the Englishman who had shot poor Priyamvada. Three of the five Mahrattas fighting by the side of Volmerange and Daksha had slipped to the ground killed or mortally wounded.

His ammunition expended, Volmerange was now hacking with his sword the heads of the regulars and sepoys who clung to the elephant's ears or climbed upon its tusks to storm the howdah. At last a sepoy, crawling on the ground, got behind the courageous animal, and with a sword as sharp-edged as a Damascus

blade, hamstrung it; the elephant, falling backwards, uttered a terrible scream, broke the sepoy's back with a blow of his tail, tried to rise, and fell upon its side. Priyamvada's body was hurled from the howdah on to the heap of dead, as was also Daksha, who by a miraculous chance had escaped unhurt. Volmerange had let himself slip behind a tree, the branches of which he used to break his fall; a riderless horse passing by, he sprang upon his back and drove his heels into its sides. The horse, which was of the Nedji breed, went off like an arrow.

Daksha, who had never let go his sprig of cousa, said to himself as he resumed his former attitude, —

"The business failed because I was too sensual; I should have put five iron spikes, instead of three, into my back; five is a more mysterious number."

The elephant, which was not dead although it had fallen, sought with its trunk for the body of its young mistress, which it piously replaced on the velvet howdah, after which it expired; for a soldier had driven his bayonet into its brain at the back of the skull.

XVIII

THE small white dot noted by Benedict, that marked with imperceptible silvern fleck the vast green mantle of ocean, was indeed the "Lovely Jenny," keeping its appointment with commendable punctuality; it had already been cruising off and on for three days, within range of the island, at such a distance as not to attract attention, though not so great but that the ship could be made out, through a strong glass, by one who knew of its being near St. Helena.

Twenty times an hour Sir Arthur Sidney would go on deck and look through his telescope towards the black rock; the thin outline of the stunted tree still showed against the heavens.

"It is still there," Sidney would reflect, letting fall the glass with discouragement; but a few minutes later he would again scour the horizon, and still on the summit of the rock the silhouette of the tree showed steadily.

"Well," said Sidney to himself, "I suppose the password could not be exchanged, and my undertaking, prosecuted with so much care and prudence, will fail at the moment of success!"

Carried away with feverish impatience he strode up and down the quarter-deck, climbed the forecastle, and again scanned the isle. Now the crest of the rock showed angular and bare against the bright sky; the tree had vanished!

This simple fact, suddenly answering a world of ideas and projects, moved him so deeply that in spite of his coolness and firmness, he was obliged to lean against the rail; a deadly pallor covered his handsome features: but he soon recovered himself, and went down firmly into his cabin.

There he wrote on a piece of parchment a sort of testament, which he enclosed in a strong glass bottle, which he sealed with a leaden cap; he then enclosed it in the canoe which he had had constructed on the African coast by a ship's carpenter, from the small model I have mentioned.

When night fell he ordered the boat to be launched; Saunders and Jack having each taken an oar, and Sidney the yoke lines, the craft proceeded towards the

island. On reaching a point where it might be perceived, Sidney, Saunders, and Jack entered the low cabin below the deck, for the boat was of very peculiar construction and decked over. Having carefully closed the hatch, Sidney touched a button, and the boat began to sink, until the water closed over it in eddies. Outer fins, worked from within, replaced the oars, and drove the submarine craft, the steersman standing behind plates of glass placed in the bows. A leather tube ending in a floating buoy, which any one would have mistaken for a piece of wreckage driven by the waves, supplied fresh air to the narrow cabin; a compartment which could be filled or emptied at will by means of a pump performed the function of an air-bladder, and enabled the boat to descend or to keep at a given depth.

When Sidney knew by the darker colour of the sea, that they had reached the shadows cast by the high cliffs that surround the island, the boat rose again to the surface, and as it was half submerged, the waves washing over it, it would have been taken, if it had been noticed, for a small whale or a shark travelling close to the surface.

The party thus reached the rock at the foot of which the waves were still tossing the trunk of the

tree cut down by Benedict, carrying it away and throwing it against the rocks with endless play of foam and spray.

Sidney emerged carefully from the hatchway, and landing on a narrow, sandy beach, and clinging to the asperities of the rocks, reached a platform several yards above the level of the highest waves, where he sat down and listened attentively.

For a few moments he heard nothing but the deep breathing of the ocean and the flapping wings of the sea birds, troubled by the presence of man at night in that solitary waste. Presently some pebbles falling from the upper portion of the cliff, rolled, fell down, and shot into the water.

A dark form, clinging to the tufts of brush that grew here and there, and to the cracks in the granite, was descending carefully the almost vertical cliff and approaching Sidney.

Although the meeting had been agreed upon for a long time, Sir Arthur, lest there should have occurred one of those improbable betrayals that always happen in such enterprises, cocked two small pistols in his pockets; the sharp sound caused the dark form to stop in its progress.

"Crabs walk backward, but they reach their destination," said a low, but distinct voice.

"Ah! it is you, Benedict," answered Sir Arthur Sidney in the same way.

"It is I," replied Benedict, sitting down by Sidney's side.

"Well?" said the latter, in a tone full of questioning.

"On seeing the bouquet of violets he spoke the words agreed upon."

"It is well; now we shall act."

"That is not all: that very evening a note, written in cipher, of which you and I alone possess the key, was thrown by an unknown hand into Edith's chamber. The note contained these words: 'Cesar is too ill to risk the enterprise, and postpones it to the first days of next month, to the night of the fourth to the fifth.'"

"Three weeks more to wait!" cried Sir Arthur Sidney. "Does he not know that the air here is deadly, and that Prometheus would need no vulture to pick out his heart? Are you sure of the note? We are so surrounded with traps."

"I have brought it, you can examine it," said Sir Benedict Arundel, holding out to his friend a paper folded into the shape of a square.

"Good-bye, Benedict, in twenty days I shall be back," said Sidney; "I go back to my submarine boat, and will cruise off and on with the 'Lovely Jenny.' In twenty days the stain which Sir Hudson Lowe has made on England's name shall be washed away."

Benedict climbed back to the top of the cliffs; Sidney climbed down to the shore, where the half submerged boat was awaiting him, and on the rock, again deserted, the sea continued to toy with the tree it was tearing to pieces.

On the appointed day the "Lovely Jenny" re-appeared on the horizon, but the heavens were dark and threatening; huge black clouds were spread like funeral draperies; the ocean, stirred to its very depths, rose and moaned, and the wind uttered a chant of desolation, like an invisible chorus; it seemed as if the three thousand Oceanides had come to mourn the Titan. St. Helena, amid the foam that smoked around it as tripods round a catafalque, was even gloomier than usual; on its brow the storm had set a sinister diadem of lightning.

Already signs had been seen in the heavens, as at the death of Julius Cæsar and Jesus Christ; a bloody comet had dragged its tail above the accursed island,

and the clouds, blazing in the furnaces of the West, had assumed the form of great eagles flapping their gigantic wings in the flames; but never had Nature, so impassible, appeared so moved, so terrified, so beside itself as on that night.

The ocean hurled to heaven its bitter tears, the sky wept with its cataclysms, and the gale summed up in its great voice the despairing cry of humanity. Intrepid as he was, Sir Arthur Sidney felt troubled and discouraged in the presence of the formidable sadness of the elements. What was happening, that all Nature thus mourned? What great soul was about to take flight, bearing away with it the wrath of the world? What God, crying on his cross the *lama sabachthani* of the last agony, caused this vast ululation of winds and waves? He dreaded the answer, and as he entered the boat, pale as marble, a cold sweat ran down his temples, his teeth chattered, and yet it was not physical danger that troubled him.

The craft, hermetically closed, sank below the waves or rose on their crests, and advanced, sometimes plunging, sometimes floating, towards the rock where had taken place the last interview between Benedict and Sidney. An open boat would have infallibly been sunk.

It was difficult to avoid being smashed against the granite cliffs, and to land exactly at the little sandy beach. Sidney and his two sailors made the most prodigious efforts. The air was beginning to fail, in spite of the supply coming through the tubes; their lungs were swelling in their breasts, seeking for the vital fluid; their light turned dim, and Jack and Saunders were pulling at the fins less heartily, while Sidney was pumping hard to bring the boat to the surface.

The waves were breaking against the rocky coast with terrific roar and thundering, and smashed heavily against the sides of the boat, which they rolled along their crests.

"Well," said Sidney to himself, "we are lost;" and he looked at his two companions in the dying light of the lamp; on their manly faces the same thought was visible.

"Sir Arthur," said Jack, "it is very unpleasant to be drowned like rats in a trap, but what can't be helped must be endured."

Saunders nodded acquiescence.

Sidney raged at the thought that they were about to perish so wretchedly because of a stupid tempest, at the very moment of accomplishing the plan for which he

had sacrificed everything; there occurred in him one of those mad revolts of mind against brutal force, of the soul against the elements, and he uttered in his heart a blasphemy such as the giants must have uttered when smitten by the thunderbolts.

The lamp went out. Jack and Saunders said:—

"Good-night; lights out!"

The boat struck heavily. Sidney, springing to the hatchway, gave access to a puff of air mingled with sea-water. The keel had caught in the sand, and as a projecting rock broke the seas, the waters were less turbulent here than elsewhere. Sidney managed to jump ashore with the painter and made the boat fast to a huge fallen block of granite. Jack and Saunders followed him, and the three men climbed up to the high platform where Benedict had met his friend on his last visit.

There they were safe from the back-wash; the tempest could only insult them with its foam. They remained for two hours on the rock, drenched, dazzled by the lightning, soaked by the salt spray driven by the winds, — Jack and Saunders, with the devoted impassibility of dogs awaiting their masters' orders; Sir Arthur Sidney, nervous, trembling, almost hysterical; every

minute seeming an age; biting his lips, tearing his breast with his nails, as he tried to be patient.

The night wore on, the gale gradually passed away, the weary sea was running less heavily.

"What can be the matter?" murmured Sidney; "it will soon be day."

Indeed the dawn now shone pale along the lower sky, and then the bloody sun showed above the heavy sea, still disturbed by the night gale, its orb cut by the undulating line of the horizon. In the distance the "Lovely Jenny" was rising and falling upon the waves.

Day had come, but not the Emperor!

XIX

WHY does not Benedict send me word? What can have happened? What unexpected obstacle has caused our well-planned scheme to fail?" asked Sir Arthur of himself, as he strode up and down the narrow platform, to warm his limbs chilled by the coolness of the night. "To live so long, with but one thought, one hope; to devote one's self to it absolutely, with the most complete self-abnegation; to give up for it love, family, and friendship; to sacrifice to it every human feeling and one's own genius; to put at its service a mighty and inflexible will and forces that could overturn the world, — then, at the very moment of fulfilment, to be stopped by some idiotic obstacle: yesterday, by an absurd tempest; this morning, by some foolish incident I cannot imagine, — a key, perhaps, that would not turn in a lock; a soldier who had been bribed and who feels scruples after he has the money, and wants to be paid twice over; even less than that, it may be, for no one can foresee the innumerable, stupid resistances of thoughts to ideas, and of matter to mind."

While these thoughts passed through his mind, Sidney was gesticulating wildly; he suddenly stopped, crossed his arms on his breast, and remained for a few moments sunk in deep thought.

"Suppose chance has a will, too? Oh!" he went on after a pause, "in that case *my* will shall break the other down."

While Sidney was indulging in these thoughts, Jack and Saunders, very much less inclined to meditation, were chewing their quid, passing it now into the right and now into the left cheek, and gazing at the sea with the attentive though apparently careless glance of the sailor, who cannot help watching, even when he is safe on land, the element on which his life depends.

The gale had fallen, and the boat's stern, the bows caught in the sand and held by the painter, rose and fell softly upon the lessening heave.

"Come, Saunders, climb that rock, and stand sentry up there. As for you Jack, get into the boat and pump out any water that may have found its way into the cabin."

The two sailors started to carry out Sidney's orders, — the one climbed up, the other climbed down.

At first glance, the notion of a man ascending to the top of the cliffs seemed absurd; but on closer examination the rock proved less vertical than it appeared; it sloped here and there, and resting-places seemed to have been provided by Nature's industrious hands; at the least accessible spots shrubs, brambles, or plants offered a hold to the climber. Saunders therefore quickly got to the top, but the country was deserted, and he signed to Sidney that he could make out nothing.

Jack soon pumped the boat dry, for in spite of the heavy tossing of the night before, it had not been damaged; so if only the Emperor came nothing was yet lost.

But the day passed without any one appearing.

It is impossible to express Sidney's sufferings during those long hours of waiting. Towards midday he said to himself: —

"Yes, it will come off to-night. No doubt yesterday's gale made them think I would not put in; the wind was so strong and the sea so heavy. That must have been the reason — I was a fool not to have thought of it at first; for indeed no one but a madman like myself would venture out in such weather."

This notion buoyed him up until evening, and he even grew calm enough to eat some biscuit and drink some rum, which Jack brought from the boat.

Saunders had seen nothing from his observatory. The "Lovely Jenny," troubled at not seeing the boat return, had drawn closer to the island than prudence dictated, and was tacking off and on and signalling.

"Although I am a prey to the deepest anxiety," thought Sidney, "Benedict was right not to come and inform me of the cause of the delay; his going and coming might have excited suspicion; they keep so strict watch on this accursed island that the least imprudence might have been fatal on this supreme occasion."

Thus did Sidney pass the day, in alternations of hope and despair, and in such lively anxiety that the hair on his temples turned white. Evening came on, and the sun sank gradually on the other side of the sea, after having plunged through several banks of clouds, as a shell bursts through the floors of a building; the bloody reflection was prolonged over the luminous waves, then died out, and night fell with the rapidity peculiar to tropical regions.

The hours of darkness seemed to Sidney longer than endless eternities, and I cannot attempt to depict the

night he spent; expectation, uneasiness, rage, despair, and the wildest suppositions, struggled in the mind of the unfortunate man until dawn returned.

A thought suddenly struck Sidney, and chilled him as if a steel blade had been driven into his heart: Could the emperor have mistrusted him?

"Of course; I am an Englishman," he went on with a bitter laugh that was almost maniacal. "Or can he be worse?"

Utterly careless of safety, at the repeated risk of falling into the sea, using his hands and feet, clinging to the projections and shrubs, driving his nails into the smooth wall, — he reached in a few moments the top of the cliffs, and started to run in the direction of Longwood.

The environs of the residence presented an unwonted aspect; the gale of the night before had uprooted all the trees, which lay with soiled leaves, their roots in the air; a feeling of sombreness, solemnity, and irreparable misfortune weighed down upon the humble dwelling, in and around which there were evidences of discreet activity and silent agitation. The sentinels, leaning on their muskets, no longer challenged, and seemed to have relaxed their watchfulness; remaining motionless in their places they carelessly fulfilled a useless duty, rather

through obedience to military orders than through necessity. The officers who passed did not reproach them with their negligence. The residents of the island went and came without being stopped, and Sidney crossed the line of guards without any one paying attention to him.

He approached Longwood; men and women, suspending their steps, spoke in a low voice, with an air of constraint, entered the house and came out in a few minutes paler than before, their eyes red.

Sir Arthur Sidney, his heart filled with a dreadful presentiment, his limbs giving way under him, leaning against the wall, stumbling, intoxicated by grief, followed the crowd without quite knowing what he was doing.

But he had not gone many steps before a sorrowful spectacle of majesty presented itself to his eye. Lying in his war mantle, rather like a soldier resting before the next day's victory than like a body which life has left, Napoleon, stretched upon his state bed, wearing the uniform of the Light Infantry of the Guard, his breast covered with orders and brilliant stars, his trusty sword by his side like a faithful friend,—was dreaming his first dream of eternity. A strange expression of serenity and deliverance illumined his pale, marble-like face, which the convulsions of agony had respected; every-

thing which the intoxication of triumph, the pain of reverses, the fatiguing thoughts of suffering can leave in the way of material traces upon the human face, had vanished. It was no longer the body of a man, but the statue of a god; death allowed the celestial portion to show through the terrestrial; the dungeon was transformed into a tomb, the funeral chamber into an Olympus. Neither Christ on his cross nor Prometheus on his rock had a nobler or handsomer face.

Oh! great, imperial soul, what did you behold during your first hours of immortality? Who dared to meet you, to lead you to God? Alexander, Charlemagne, Julius Cæsar, your well-beloved Lannes, who called upon you alone as he died, — or your dear Duroc? Or was it some poor grenadier of your Old Guard, who thought his blood well shed when he found that you remembered his name?

At the sight of dead Napoleon, Sidney turned faint; the pinions of vertigo flapped noisily within his brain; he staggered forward, and falling upon his knees by the bedside, kissed the icy hand that had held the sceptre of the world. He was not interfered with, for kisses bring no one back to life; only, as he remained some-

what too long sunk in his grief, he was urged with a musket-butt to give way to others. .

He went out, wan, broken down, scarcely able to drag himself, — more like a phantom than a man, having aged a score of years in one minute; his haggard, lack-lustre eyes wandering around or sometimes resting upon some insignificant object with puerile obstinacy. He was amazed to find himself alive now that the Emperor was dead; he wondered that the sun still shone, that the mountains had not changed their shapes, that Nature went on with its work. As for himself, he was weak, as after a long illness; the light dazzled him; the air was too strong for him; his faculties, so long kept on a stretch, suddenly failed him; his firm, powerful will had lost its bearings and went around like a crazy needle; a tremendous crash had occurred in him.

His body, moved by a distant remembrance, took him to Edith's country-house; he pushed the garden gate, entered the parlour, and sank on a chair without a word. Edith, whose pallor was made the greater by the black dress she wore, advanced silently towards him and took his hand. This mark of sympathy caused Sidney's tears, which sought to flow, to rush

forth impetuously through the hand with which he had covered his eyes.

At this moment Benedict entered, and explained to Sidney why he had failed to be at the meeting-place: he had been questioned and detained, his movements having excited suspicion; the Emperor's death and lack of proof had caused him to be at once released. But Sidney did not listen, for explanations had no meaning for him henceforth.

He remained a few days longer on the island, seeking to satisfy his grief to the utmost; he followed the funeral procession into the Valley of Fermain, into which falls from Diana's Peak the brook the Emperor loved, and where weep the willows whose sacred leaves have since been scattered over the universe. He watched the English soldiers bear away the coffin on their shoulders; saw it lowered into the stone tomb, and withdrew only when the black opening was closed by the long and narrow stone. He wanted, by taking in carefully all these details of the funeral, to persuade himself that his misfortune was real; he feared lest later he should believe that the Emperor was not dead; he already felt that illusion arising in his mind, although he had beheld Napoleon dead on his state bed, and had

touched his icy cold hand; he meant to have a recollection of the funeral and tomb to oppose to his own fancies.

As he climbed the hill towards Hutsgate, he turned around a last time, to look at the new white stone under the soft shade of the willows, and said: —

"My soul is buried with that body."

At that moment a man dressed in mourning, and speaking English with a French accent, held out a paper to Sidney, and said: —

"Take this from him who is gone."

Sidney opened the envelope, sealed with black wax; it contained a small lock of fine silk hair, and a note on which were written these words: —

"Console yourself, no one can prevail against God.

"N."

When Sidney looked up the man who had handed him the paper had vanished.

So he sat down on the slope of the hill, and sank into a deep reverie. When he arose his features had become more calm; a change had come over him; he returned to Benedict's house, and said to him: —

"Forgive me for having turned you away from hap-

piness, in order to make you a partner in my mad attempt. I free you from your oath."

And he drew from his pocket-book the yellowed paper, which he tore and cast at Benedict's feet.

"Return to Europe; you are free; nothing now binds you longer to our mysterious association; follow the inclination of your heart, be happy; do not seek to alter the book of Fate, — other hands than ours hold the threads of events, and perhaps what seems to us unjust is supreme equity. As for me, the car of my life has been thrown out of its rut, and cannot get back into it; I was fit for one thing only; that thing has failed; it is all over; and whether I am buried to-day, the day after to-morrow, or later, is no matter —I am dead. Thought, feeling, and will have fled and vanished. And you, my dear Edith, do you try to find some reason for living — it may be you have already done so."

As he said this, Sir Arthur Sidney looked steadily at Edith, who could not help blushing.

"Love some one, a man, a child, a dog, a flower, but never an idea, — that is dangerous."

Having spoken these words, Sidney shook hands with his friends, and returned to the black rock where

Saunders and Jack, who had used up their tobacco, were beginning to feel very weary.

Arundel and Miss Edith, left alone on the island, did not hasten their departure as might at first have been thought they would do, although St. Helena is a pretty lonely place. Edith, thrown into the sea by her husband, was in no hurry to return to Europe; Benedict, although he claimed and believed himself to be still deeply in love with Annabel, was in no wise weary of life in the cottage, which a city merchant would have declared uncomfortable, but which was illumined by Edith's presence. The young woman on her part, was astonished to find she thought so little of Volmerange; and the pair of them made incredible efforts to retain within their hearts the love which was escaping.

Already Benedict could not find in his memory the lovely features of his beauteous bride; Edith's always mingled with them; sometimes a sweet, veiled glance, sometimes a tender and melancholy smile; the two faces melted one into the other. Edith was in precisely the same position; when in her thoughts she called up Volmerange, it was very often Benedict who appeared,—indeed after some time, Volmerange did

not come, and Edith began to think that a man who drowned his wife so summarily was not, perhaps, an ideal husband.

Naturally the two young people insisted on anticipating uncommon happiness on their return to London, when Benedict might at last marry Annabel, and Edith, sufficiently punished, would be reconciled to her terrible husband.

Usually these conversations began gaily, but they generally ended in a somewhat melancholy mood. Benedict did not like the idea of Edith returning to Volmerange, and Edith was not greatly delighted at the thought of the happiness which awaited her friend with Miss Vyvyan. Such were the thoughts which filled the minds of the young couple in St. Helena, while a few yards from the house the weeping willow drooped its leaves over the greatest tomb in the world, — if there be any difference between tombs.

Their own tender feelings occupied them much more than the effect of Napoleon's death upon the destinies of the world; even when at night they went to Fermain Valley to contemplate the Titan's tomb, to listen to the brook murmuring past the corner of the funeral stone, and to watch the wind whirl away the

pale leaves of the melancholy tree, — they were thinking of themselves.

A curl of hair falling upon Edith's neck, brought out with its rich brown colour the pale rosy cheek, and drew Benedict away from the great thoughts which the tomb of the most illustrious of captains ought to have inspired, while his admiring glance promptly dried in Edith's lovely eyes the tears that sprang to them at the remembrance of the great captive.

They at first thought of writing to Europe, to inform their friends of their return, but they thought better of it and agreed it was wiser to come unexpectedly into the midst of the general grief; it would be a pleasant philosophical experiment. They would be able to judge for themselves of the depth and the sincerity of the regrets they had excited; they would see for themselves whether the places they had left empty had been filled, and whether faith had been kept in Europe as in Africa. Annabel must certainly be in tears, Volmerange devoured by remorse. But suppose it should not be so? Suppose Miss Vyvyan, indignant at Benedict's inexplicable disappearance, had taken back her heart? Suppose Volmerange did not feel the least regret at

having thrown his wife into the Thames? — what would they do in that case? Our two innocent hypocrites dared not confess, even to themselves, that they would be delighted if that were the case, and that the proper thing under those circumstances would be to go on loving each other, as they had been doing secretly for the last two months.

They allowed one or two vessels proceeding from Calcutta to London to pass by, and at last made up their minds to board the third, — a swift sailing-vessel, built of teak, copper-fastened and copper-bottomed, — which took them in six weeks to Cadiz, whence they continued their trip by land, visiting Andalusia, Seville, Granada, Cordova, — still under the convenient appellation of Mr. and Mrs. Smith. Everybody thought they were married; some gossip-mongers saying they were two young lovers enjoying their honeymoon. Their pillows alone knew the truth; they were madly in love, but the angel of modesty might have been present at every moment of their life. Only they did not hasten back, and what with visiting mosques and cathedrals, Alcazars, palaces, going to *tertulias* and bull-fights, — it took them some four months to traverse Spain; so that they reached Paris just in time for the

winter season. Finally, when they had no longer any decent pretext to delay, as they were exceedingly conscientious, they remarked to each other one evening: —

"Is it not time to go back to London, and to see whether we are loved and forgiven, or replaced and cursed?"

The thought of meeting again those whom they pretended they loved best in the world, made them so sad that they felt ready to burst into tears, and to fall into each other's arms, never again to separate. But the situation was becoming embarrassing: Sir Benedict Arundel could not go on calling himself Mr. Smith, nor Lady Edith Harley, Countess of Volmerange, Mrs. Smith, which is a very prosaic and commonplace name. So the next morning they called for post horses for Calais, and a few hours later were awaiting the departure of the steamer.

XX

THE horse caught by Volmerange was a thorough-bred, swift as the wind; in a few minutes it carried its rider beyond the centre of the battle, or rather of the massacre, for it was now only a confused battling of elephants, horses, and men. The rout was complete.

For some time Volmerange heard the elephants trumpeting in the distance, and saw on the ground, red with the reflection of the burning wood, the shadow of his horse, galloping before him like a strange, monstrous form he was pursuing; the horse itself, maddened by the deformed shape, sprang furiously forward, and bent down to bite at it.

Little by little the fleeing men who, during the first part of Volmerange's mad rush, had been galloping by his side, were left behind; the screams of the elephants had ceased to be heard, and the night had resumed its blue tint. Volmerange still galloped at top speed along the banks of the Godavari, his horse with marvellous

instinct avoiding the pitfalls, jumping fallen trees, and swerving from quagmires without ever diminishing its speed in the least.

When Volmerange had ridden some twenty-five or thirty miles from the battle-field, he pulled in his horse, and guided by a light which twinkled on the river bank, reached the hut of a fisherman, busy mending his net, who prostrated himself before him after having helped him to dismount.

The Count sat down against the wall of the hut on a bench covered with saptaparna, and speaking to the fisherman in Hindoostanee asked him if he could procure for him other clothes, and a boat in which he might descend the river.

"I can do so," answered the fisherman, who had recognized his rank by his insignia, "but your lordship may not care to put on the humble dress of a poor Hindoo of the lowest class, a wretched soudra, who is not worthy of pressing with his brow the dust on your lordship's road."

"The meaner the dress, the more suitable it will be," said Volmerange, entering the hut.

Helped by the fisherman, he threw off his warrior's dress and put on the humble garments, under which it

would have been difficult to recognize the leader of the insurrection. The fisherman, for greater safety, advised him to stain his face and hands with the juice of the colocynth, as his comparatively fair complexion might betray him.

Having taken these precautions, the fisherman cast loose his boat, and the horse, that had come down to the river bank, seeing that its services were no longer needed, dashed off, after noisily breathing in the air, towards the hill, where, no doubt, lay his pasturage.

I shall not follow Volmerange day by day during the course of his river trip, which was long. Let it suffice that he gained the coast in safety, and after rewarding the fisherman with one of the precious stones that adorned the hilt of his sabre, he boarded a French vessel sailing up the gulf of Bengal, which had stopped at the river mouth to fill up with fresh water.

As he was returning alone, or at least accompanied but by the remembrance of two dead women, — Edith whom he had drowned, and Priyamvada shot by his side, — he did not, although the distance was great, take nearly as much time to return to Europe as did Edith and Sir Benedict Arundel.

In spite of himself a secret attraction dragged him back to London, which he had so many reasons to avoid; it may be he obeyed that singular magnetism which men feel just as much as animals, and which induces them to return to the same place after every violent blow of Fate which has compelled them to leave it; like bulls, that always return to the *querencia* until they die.

Although, owing to the rush of events, the Count had not had time to mourn Priyamvada's unhappy fate, as it deserved, it had, nevertheless, produced a deep impression upon him; he felt himself circumvented by some dark fatality, and he resolved to dwell alone for fear of bringing evil upon those he might love; so he lived in isolation, going out at night only, and then to deserted places, — not that there was any reason why he should hide, for before leaving for India he had sent Edith's letters to Lord and Lady Harley, with these words at the foot: "Justice has been done." The family had spread the report that the girl, taken to Italy by the Count, to enjoy the honeymoon, had died at Naples of a fever caught in the Pontine marshes. As this was in no wise unlikely, society, which does not busy itself much about those that have dropped out, was

satisfied with the specious statement, — Lord and Lady Harley's grief confirming it.

One evening the Count de Volmerange was walking in the quietest part of Hyde Park. A young lady, whose elegant and rich dress marked her as belonging to the highest aristocracy, was walking swiftly, accompanied at some distance by a servant in livery, along the pond which lies in the solitary portion of the park which is frequented usually only by lovers, poets, and dreamers; sometimes also by pickpockets, for a man of evil appearance, issuing suddenly from the shrubbery, sprang towards the lady, and seizing her shawl, which was fastened by a large jewelled pin, endeavoured to drag away the rich tissue. The servant ran up, but a blow, delivered in accordance with the best rules of boxing, and which struck him square in the face, sent him to the ground, a couple of yards away, his nose and mouth bleeding.

The thief still pulled at the shawl, and the young woman, almost strangled, could scarcely call for help. Volmerange, happening to reach a turn of the walk, saw the struggle, and reaching the group at one bound, re-established the balance of affairs by a blow of his stick, which slashed the thief's face like a sabre cut, and

made him flee howling with pain in spite of his very natural desire to hold his tongue.

The lady was so terrified she could scarcely stand, and Volmerange was obliged to give up pursuing the thief, in order to support her. When she had somewhat recovered, Volmerange was about to withdraw after having gravely bowed to her, but the lady held out her hand, stopped him, and said in a timid and beseeching voice : —

" Oh ! sir, be chivalrous a little longer ; kindly take me back to my carriage ; my poor Daniel is in a piteous condition, and I am afraid that if these evil-doers see me alone again, they may attack me once more."

It was scarcely possible to refuse such a request, and although Volmerange had sworn to himself never to trouble again with any woman, he could not help offering, graciously enough for a misanthrope who intended to surpass the savageness of Timon of Athens, the protection which was asked with an insistence that terror rendered almost caressing.

The carriage was waiting at a somewhat distant point, so that on the way these two persons, so unexpectedly brought together, were enabled to become somewhat acquainted with each other. And, indeed,

a woman with whom you have gone a couple of hundred yards, holding on to your arm, and still agitated by deep emotion, pressing you with her hand because her feet are trembling, ceases to be a stranger. So Volmerange, who had time to notice the beauty of the lady, and to gather from the few remarks they exchanged on the way that she was clever, involuntarily slackened his steps, when he saw, drawn up near one of the park gates, a carriage with its shining panels and its splendid coat of arms.

"I hope you will not refuse," she said after having seated herself in the satin-lined carriage, and before the footman closed the door, "to tell me the name of my deliverer. I am Miss Annabel Vyvyan."

"I am Count de Volmerange," he replied, with a deep bow.

Miss Annabel Vyvyan, for it was she, walked, after the fashion of young English women, every day in that part of the park, and though her adventure might well have caused her to abandon her pedestrian excursions, she returned the next day at the accustomed hour. Perhaps she had a vague presentiment that in case of accident her protector would not fail to be there, for she went down the same walk as the day

before, and skirted the Serpentine as she usually did; although she did not quite say so to herself, she desired to delicately reward Volmerange's courage, the recompense being the opportunity to meet her a second time.

Possibly Volmerange, for his part, fancied Miss Annabel Vyvyan was not quite safe in that part of the park, in spite of the footman who followed her, for the next day he took his walk precisely at the same place and at the same hour.

Neither of them appeared astonished at meeting, and they chatted for some little time,—longer perhaps than strict conventionality allowed; and Volmerange, for fear of an unpleasant occurrence, escorted Miss Annabel back to her carriage.

Not long afterwards the Count was regularly presented to Lady Eleanor Braybrooke, who thought him charming, and noted with pleasure that he paid long and frequent visits; for the practical lady considered that Miss Annabel carried too far her faithfulness to her imaginary widowhood.

What I have now to relate violates the poetics of novels, which admit of but a single, eternal love; this, however, is not a novel. Miss Annabel Vyvyan, who had scarcely believed that after the disappearance or

death of Benedict, she could ever love again, was quite surprised to feel her heart — which she believed extinguished forever under the ashes of her first disappointment — beating again: the name of Count Volmerange, when he was announced by the footman, always brought a faint colour to Miss Annabel's pale cheeks; at night, when after two or three hours' delightful conversation with Volmerange, she laid her head upon her lace-trimmed pillow, and submitted to that little self-examination which every pretty woman indulges in about the flirtations of the day, — she would acknowledge that she had replied with too indulgent a glance to a burning look, discussed too long points of amorous metaphysics, and had not withdrawn her hand quickly enough when bidding good-night. When she had gone to sleep, her dreams were filled with the face of Volmerange rather than that of Benedict.

The two couples that had met at the door of St. Margaret's church, had physically and morally crossed over, and, by a curious symmetry, just as Benedict now loved Edith, so did Miss Annabel love Volmerange, who returned her love. Chance in these contradictory combinations seemed to enjoy crossing human purposes; neither of the projected unions had been

accomplished, none of the pledges given had been kept; those of the four who were apparently well matched, had on the contrary, fallen in love with the others. A mysterious power had substituted for the rational plan of these lives, a fantastic scenario, extravagant, illogical; the unity of place and action had been violated by the great Romanticist who arranges human dramas, and is called the Unexpected.

Lady Braybrooke, who greatly desired to see Annabel married, after what she called Benedict's affront, never ceased to praise Volmerange to her; her praise was naturally accompanied by reprobation of the former bridegroom. Nothing definite had yet been spoken, but their hearts understood each other; Volmerange was a declared lover, and gave his arm to Lady Eleanor Braybrooke, and when the aunt and niece went to the theatre he always had a seat at the back of the box, behind Miss Annabel. It must be confessed that the finest settings and most pathetic scenes scarcely caused him to look up, for his glance rested by preference upon the sweeping lines of Miss Annabel's neck and lovely shoulders. And so it was that, though he frequented the theatre, no one was less acquainted with the repertoire; and Lady Eleanor Braybrooke was

somewhat surprised at so intelligent a gentleman profiting so little by the fine things which he seemed to listen to so attentively.

Annabel did indeed, from time to time, feel a vague dread of the sudden appearance of Benedict, who would reproach her with her disloyalty: for no woman will admit that a man can be faithless, though she herself never lacks excellent reasons to justify a similar fault on her own part; but the months passed, and Benedict's disappearance was still enveloped in the deepest obscurity; Miss Vyvyan had therefore gradually overcome her dread of any posthumous claim, and was beginning to love Volmerange without feeling too much terrified at the possible consequences; while the latter had totally forgotten Edith and even Priyamvada.

His adventures with the latter only occurred to him as the hallucinations of an opium dream, — her golden complexion, her painted eyes, her exotic perfumes, their excursions on elephants' backs, their meetings in the pagodas, the battles in the forest filled with creepers, — all these strange scenes recurred to the Count as unreal remembrances. Had Priyamvada lived, charming though she was, she would certainly have proved an embarrassment to Volmerange, for what would have

been said, had he taken her to Almack's, of a lady who wore ear-rings in her nose, and whose brow was tattooed with gorothchana? Yet the Count could not help a feeling of sadness, as he recalled the perfect beauty, the ardent love, and the boundless devotion of the poor Hindoo maid. These qualities, although somewhat uncommon and irregular, did deserve some regrets.

During all these chances and changes, Miss Edith and Sir Benedict Arundel, whom we left on the Calais pier, had taken ship and reached England.

Before entering London, they had separated, and each had taken a house in a retired section. Naturally the fiction of the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Smith could no longer be kept up; besides, Miss Edith was Countess of Volmerange, and Sir Benedict the husband of Miss Annabel Vyvyan, or nearly so. They had returned from St. Helena, with the intention of resuming wedded life; then they had also to carry out the philosophical test they had agreed upon.

Volmerange had received a note from Annabel, inviting him to call for her with her aunt, and to go to a concert at Princess ——'s. He was dressed and ready to go when his valet informed him that a veiled lady desired to speak to him.

"A veiled lady? that is a curious visit at such an hour as this! It is a long time since I have given up frequenting the wings of Drury Lane, and this is not the operatic season. Who the devil can it be? I suppose some high-principled mother, who wants me to engage her daughter as companion."

"What shall I tell the lady, sir?" asked the valet, who evidently waited for an answer.

"Tell her to write her name, and what she wants, on her card."

"I did so, sir," answered the valet, "but she replied she did not wish to give her name, and would speak to you alone."

"Is she young or old, ugly or pretty?" asked the Count, through an excess of precaution.

"As far as I can judge of the appearance of the veiled lady, sir, she is pretty, and by the lightness of her walk I should judge she is young."

The Count looked at the clock, and saw he had a half-hour to spare before calling on Annabel; he told his servant to show in the mysterious person.

The curious visit, the determination not to give her name, the veil drawn over the features, combined to give a romantic turn to the adventure, which easily

captivated the lively imagination of the Count; and yet, in spite of himself, he felt a vague terror, and shuddered involuntarily. He happened to catch sight of himself in the mirror, and saw that he was pale.

The room was large, richly but quietly furnished, and lighted by a single lamp, the beams of which, concentrated in a single point, left the rest of the room in shadow. It was raining, and the rain beat on the windows in a way that recalled a certain tempestuous night.

An anxious expectation, contrasting with the trifling nature of his replies to his servant, filled Volmerange's heart. When the door opened to give passage to the stranger, the slight creaking of the hinges caused him to start nervously.

The door was in shadow, so the Count could not at first make out the lady who had entered, but with the well-bred courtesy which marked him, he advanced towards her. The light of the lamp now fell full upon the new-comer; the valet was right — it was not ugliness, but a secret or modesty, which induced the use of the veil, through which the beauty of the lady shone like a fire behind a metallic grating. She could not be seen, but one felt she was beautiful. She wore a long white

gown, which fell in fine close folds like those of Phidias, and over it fell, with coquettish but funereal lines, a black lace mantilla.

"Madam," said Volmerange, "will you not draw up your veil? Since you can trust me so far as to call at my house at this hour, these precautions are useless: your secret is safe. You will not let me know your name, let me at least see your face."

"Do you wish it?" replied the unknown, in a sweet, penetrating voice.

The well-known accents made Volmerange shiver.

The lady, with a slender white hand, the shape of which recalled innumerable remembrances to the Count, began slowly to draw up the black folds of her veil; first showed her lovely chin, marked with a little mark that filled Volmerange with dread; then lips of the brightest red, which carried his terror to the highest point; then the Greek nose and the lovely brown eyes that made him mad with fright.

Holding her veil above her head with her beautiful marble hand, in an attitude worthy of an antique statue, she placidly presented herself to Volmerange's startled gaze. He had drawn back and trembled like a leaf.

"Oh!" he uttered in a low voice, "who are you?"

"I am Lady Edith, Countess of Volmerange."

"No, you lie! you are a spectre; your dress must be wet; you have come from the Thames. Go, leave me! I drowned you; you know it, I had the right to do it. What a strange adventure! Is Dolfos going to come back to life too? It would be very funny," said the Count, bursting into shrill laughter.

He was a maniac.

XXI

MISS ANNABEL, in her ball-dress, was studying in the mirror the effect of a sprig of Cape heath, coquettishly placed in her beautiful hair; she had never looked lovelier; the thought of the coming of the man she loved lighted her beauty with an inward glory that made her radiant. It is sweet at such a time to feel one's self beautiful, and to increase love by admiration. Fair, rosy, dazzling, in a dress that seemed cut out of the petals of a flower, in a gauze tunic more tenuous and transparent than the wings of a dragon-flower and caught up by sprigs of heath like that she wore in her hair, Annabel Vyvyan looked like a sylph indulging in the fancy of going out for the evening.

The maid, having done her work, withdrew. Annabel, left alone, — for Lady Eleanor Braybrooke, having much more to do in the way of repairing her beauty, remained much longer than her niece in the hands of her women, — felt that sort of restlessness which people who have dressed too early for an entertain-

ment are apt to experience. She had written Volmerange to come at nine; it was scarcely eight, so she had an hour of idleness and motionlessness to spend; for she might have disarranged her dress had she indulged in any occupation.

By way of passing the time she took up a book and read inattentively a few pages; she opened the piano and ran her polished fingers up and down the bright ivory keys, but the sound of the notes and the vibration of the strings made her nervous, so she closed the instrument. One of her bracelets, somewhat too large, slipped down on her hand, and was in her way; she went to her jewel-case to take out another; as she replaced the jewel-case, her eyes fell upon the letters Benedict had written in the days of his courtship. It so happened that this was the very anniversary of the wedding so strangely interrupted at St. Margaret's.

This fact, recalled to Miss Annabel's memory by the sight of the casket, made her sigh; moved by a melancholy fancy she drew one letter from the bundle, and standing by the mantel-piece, for she felt chilly in her low-necked dress, she began to read.

"Dear Annabel," said the letter, which had been written during a short absence, "how am I to spend

the three days which I have to pass far from you, after having become accustomed to your sweet presence, and seeing every evening your soul shining in your eyes, and your mind in your smile? The only thing which enables me to bear with the separation is the thought that soon we shall never again be parted, and that our two lives shall flow on like two streams that mingle their waters."

The reading of the note plunged Miss Annabel into a deep reverie.

"What is the use," she said to herself, "of keeping these tokens of a false love?"

And she cast the letter into the fire.

She took a second, which she read, and which joined the first in the burning coals. She thus traversed, letter by letter, the whole course of her vanished love. As soon as she had breathed the vague perfume of remembrance that clung to the notes, she threw into the flames the remains of a vanished time of happiness.

"Nine o'clock," she said as she threw away the last letter in the casket, "and Volmerange has not come."

The paper caught fire, and owing to the coals burning away, rolled on the floor in front of the fireplace;

just as it was about to go out, but revived no doubt by some draft, the letter, more than half consumed, blazed up, and the dying flame, seeking for food, touched the hem of Annabel's gauze dress, and flashed like a serpent up the folds of the light stuff. Annabel saw herself suddenly in the midst of a flaming light and a hot atmosphere; she ran to the bell-rope, but maddened by terror and pain she looked for it on the left when it was on the right, and the flames, excited by her movements, enveloped her victoriously and triumphantly. The poor child rolled on the floor to try to put out the fire, and tried to drag off her clothes as she screamed.

At that very moment the door was opened and the servant announced: —

"Sir Benedict Arundel."

"Save me, save me!" cried unfortunate Annabel, enveloped in flames.

Benedict and the servant sprang forward, but it was too late; and in the delirium of horrible agony she fixed her terrified eyes on her former lover, and murmured as the death rattle was heard: —

"Benedict here! Oh! this is too great a punishment!"

The servant, terrified, half beside himself, sprang out for a doctor and water, while Benedict endeavoured to stifle the flames that still burned Annabel's undergarments by wrapping her up in the table-cover; but when assistance came Annabel had just expired.

Benedict, half crazed, went away, unable to bear the dreadful sight; no one, in the excitement of the terrible catastrophe, paid any attention to his coming or going. — A few days later, Lady Eleanor Braybrooke received a few half-burned letters that had been picked up on the floor, and that explained the dreadful event; through her tears she managed to make out the few incomplete lines that remained, and understood that these bits of paper had caused the accident, — a discovery which further increased the hatred the good lady entertained for Benedict.

By a strange coincidence, by a mysterious fatality, Benedict's love-letters had taken back Annabel at the very moment when she expected a different visitor; a superstitious soul might have seen a chastisement in this, — but a chastisement of what? Innocence, no doubt, unless innocence pays the ransom of crime by a law of inversion, the reason for which escapes me.

The visits paid by Benedict and Miss Edith had not resulted very fortunately, and their experiment had ended as most philosophical experiments do end.

On arriving at the close of this story, or episode rather, I feel the need of clearing up the parts of the narration which would otherwise remain obscure.

During the latter years of the Empire, friendships contracted at college, acquaintances made in society or elsewhere, similarity of tastes in work or pleasure, a certain bold conformity of thought, and the curious chances of fortune had drawn together in England men of different countries and different ranks, but every one of great mind, and strong will, — men of mark in their own way. A sort of involuntary free-masonry had speedily arisen among them; they spoke to each other in society, and exchanged in the recesses of windows rapid remarks that summed up a whole philosophy in an imperceptible smile or a slight shrug of the shoulders. Many were rich, others were powerful, some were both; others skilful, some great poets, others great politicians.

The ordinary amusements of a club — wine, horses, and women — could not satisfy such people, who were

weary of the emotions of orgies and gambling; several of them, besides, could have exhibited a longer and better selected list of names than that of Don Juan. They therefore sought for an aim to which they could devote their activity, and this is what they found: the triumph of Will over Fate.

Constituting themselves into a sort of secret tribunal, they summoned before them contemporary history, and gave themselves the task of annulling its decrees when they did not consider them just. In a word, they proposed to work events over, and to correct Providence. These intrepid gamblers, bolder than the Titans of fable, tried to win back from God the games lost on the green cloth of the world, and bound themselves by most formidable oaths to assist each other in these undertakings.

The insurrection in India, the re-establishment of Napoleon on a greater throne, the deliverance of Spain, the freeing of Greece, where later Byron, who was one of the members of the Junta, came to his death,—such were the plans which these men proposed to carry out. The various movements and revolts which took place about that time were their work. They it was who guided the Mahrattas against England, who

agitated in the Peninsula, prepared the Greek insurrection, and tried to carry off the Emperor, for whom the Oriental empire he had dreamed of in his youth had been made ready in India, whence he was to return to Europe by retracing Alexander's road.

These great minds, these inflexible wills, which made over the map of the world, and determined to make Chance obey their orders, had never yet succeeded in their purpose; whenever they had nearly attained their end, they had been overthrown by that small, soft air, which is perhaps the spirit of God; all their carefully worked-out plans had failed, and, though they could not tell why, in spite of all their efforts, mysterious Fate continued on its blind way, maintaining its decisions. What appeared to them the right was beaten; what appeared to them injustice was triumphant. Genius was crucified, and mediocrity bloomed out under its golden crown. An unexpected obstacle, a treason, or some other obstacle, invariably upset their arrangements at the very moment of success. They tried to stem events, and felt themselves, in spite of their prodigious efforts, carried away by the resistless tide.

Most of them stuck to their task with the fury of a

gambler in ill-luck, the delirium of pride struggling with the impossible; madmen that they were, they cast handfuls of dust against Heaven, and like Xerxes, would willingly have had the sea beaten with rods. Others, stronger-minded, had begun to suspect what, for lack of a better expression, I shall call "the mathematics of Chance;" they began to feel that events were determined by a gravitation, the law of which had yet to be discovered by some future Newton; they agitated the world as a physicist stirs the glass to mix the liquids in it, and to see them resume their places according to their specific gravity.

Sir Arthur Sidney, Sir Benedict Arundel, Count de Volmerange, Dolfos, and Daksha belonged to this powerful association; Sidney and Daksha, as members of the upper circle, had the right to select from among their brethren those whom they considered necessary for the execution of their projects. Benedict and Volmerange, who, in spite of their oath, had taken upon themselves to dispose of their own lives, had been brought back to duty in the way narrated in this story. Yet the many lives disturbed or destroyed, the manifold sacrifices of money, courage, and genius, had effected no results; the invisible player had always won.

What I have just said will suffice to give an idea of the purpose and methods of the association, — a sort of philosophical *Vehmgerichte*, which used incredible energies and vast resources to substitute in history the human will for the divine. These men, who had little religion, who believed only in power and genius, had mistaken Providence for Chance, and taking the pen from the hand of God, had attempted to write in His place upon the Book of Eternity.

Now, as is customary at the end of a story, I have merely to state the fate of the few characters which have survived the violence of the action.

Volmerange constantly sees standing before him the white form of Edith, and crouches with terror in the corner of his cell at Bedlam, withdrawing as far as he can from the spectre which his crazed imagination shows him at the other end of the room.

As for Miss Edith and Sir Benedict Arundel, some English tourists, who were going to Smyrna and visiting the Ionian islands, said they had seen at Rhodes, in a lovely marble palace built in the days of the knights, and in which were set antique fragments, a young couple whose grave and sweet serenity gave the impression that they were enjoying as much happiness as

can fall to the lot of those whose lives have been filled with grief and divers vicissitudes; although known only under the name of Mr. and Mrs. Smith, they appeared to belong to a higher class than that humble name would indicate. They neither avoided nor sought out their fellow-countrymen, but they preferred to be alone, —a plain indication that they were happy.

Sidney never re-appeared, and no news of him was ever received. Was he dead, or had he buried in some solitude his despair at having failed in the enterprise which had been the sole aim of his life for five years? That was never known. Only, some years later, a vessel returning from India, and which had been driven by a gale towards Tristan d'Acunha, landed some of its crew upon an islet in the group to catch turtles and gather sea-birds' eggs, by way of varying somewhat the salt fare on board. One of the men stumbled on the sand over a mass of small shells which had the general outline of a bottle. Delighted with his discovery, the sailor, convinced that the bottle must contain rum, cleared away the crust of earth and shells, and forcing off the lead cap, he found, instead of the liquor he hoped for, a parchment, which he handed to his captain with a fidelity he would not have exhibited had the

contents been spirits. The captain opened the parchment, folded in four, and read the following: —

"On the point of carrying out the boldest and strangest undertaking a man ever attempted, I, Sir Arthur Sidney, my mind clear and my hand firm, knowing that the waves under which I am about to plunge may swallow me up, write these lines, which perhaps will be read later, should I perish in my submarine voyage, so that my secret may not wholly die with me.

"As an Englishman I have been deeply humiliated by the shameful behaviour of England towards the great Emperor. As a respectful son I sought to wash away this stain from my mother's honour, and to spare her the shame of having murdered her guest. I made up my mind to tear this page from the history of my country, so that hereafter men should say that if England had made him a prisoner, an Englishman had delivered him and redeemed his country's word.

"I am endeavouring to prevent my country, which I love, from committing deicide, which may bring down upon it the execration of the world, as the murder of Jesus made the Jews hated over the whole world. I have sacrificed my life to that idea; for what aim can

one have greater and holier than the glory of the human family of which we are a part? To-morrow either Prometheus, taken down from his cross, shall be on board a vessel that awaits him, and which will carry him to a new empire, and to a greater destiny perhaps than that which has astonished the world, or else God will have decreed that, in what I am undertaking, I am trespassing upon the attributes of Providence.

"May 4, 1821, in sight of St. Helena."

The captain looked thoughtfully at the parchment, the writing on which had turned yellow, and read several times the letter which, after tossing about so long in its close prison, had been cast ashore upon the deserted island, and was probably the only trace left of the fate of a noble idea, a strong will, and a great courage. He then remembered having sometimes seen Sir Arthur Sidney in London and in Calcutta.

When the ship passed St. Helena the captain saluted from afar the tomb of the great man, and said to himself: —

"God did not justify Sidney, since the Emperor is sleeping under the willow, and I have that letter in my pocketbook. Sir Arthur must have been drowned. I am sorry for it, for I should willingly have shaken hands

with him, frankly and loyally, and should like to have had him seated opposite me at table in the 'Lovely Jenny's' cabin."

The "Lovely Jenny," for it was she, had been sold to a Calcutta merchant by Captain Peppercull, to whom Sidney had said that if he did not return within five days he was to dispose of the vessel as he pleased. By a singular chance it was the "Lovely Jenny" which had picked up the will of its former owner.

Now let me state what I have managed to learn concerning Daksha. After finding Priyamvada's body by that of the elephant, he buried it, carefully observing every rite; he then resumed his former austerities and invented an attitude of frightful constraint, which must have caused the greatest pleasures to the trinities, the quadrinities, and the quintinities of the Hindoo Olympus. He has not given up hopes of re-establishing the Lunar dynasty, and still looks for Volmerange. His withered fingers rub the cousa more feverishly than ever, and his black lips murmur with delirious piety the ineffable monosyllable which contains everything — and other things besides.

In pursuance of the idea which occurred to him during the fight, he no longer suspends himself by three

hooks in the muscles of his back, but with five; thanks to this ingenious penance, he is convinced that the English will be driven from India, and that he will obtain of Heaven the favour of dying while holding on to a cow's tail, a belief which does not prevent his being a very deep philosopher, an impenetrable diplomat, a remarkable politician, or his secretly causing revolts in the provinces, and weaving endless deep intrigues, while he remains seated on his gazelle skin between four braziers, and gives a great deal of trouble to the Honourable East India Company.

The Mummy's Foot

THE MUMMY'S FOOT

HAVING nothing particular to do, I had entered the shop of one of those dealers in curiosities called bric-à-brac dealers in our Parisian slang, which is utterly unintelligible in other parts of France. No doubt you have sometimes glanced at the windows of some of these shops, which have multiplied since it has become fashionable to purchase old furniture, and every stock-broker thinks he must have a mediæval room. They have at one and the same time something of the junk-dealer, the upholsterer, the alchemist's laboratory, and the painter's studio. In these mysterious dens, through which a prudent half-light filters, what is most genuinely old is the dirt. The cobwebs there are more authentic than the lace, and old pear-tree wood is younger than mahogany imported last week from America.

The shop of my bric-à-brac dealer was a regular lumber-room; every age and every country appeared to be represented in it. A red clay Etruscan lamp rested upon a cabinet by Boule, with ebony panels austerely inlaid with brass; a half-lounge of the days of Louis

XV carelessly extended its fawn feet under a thick Louis XIII table, with heavy oaken spirals and carved foliage and monsters. In one corner gleamed the wavy breastplate of a damascened suit of Milan armour. Parian porcelain cupids and nymphs, Chinese grotesques, vases of céladon and craquelé, cups of Dresden and old Sèvres china, covered the shelves and filled up the corners. On the denticulated shelves of the sideboards shone resplendently great Japanese dishes with red and blue ornaments, set off by gold hatchings, side by side with enamels by Bernard Palissy, representing adders, frogs, and lizards in relief. From wardrobes that burst open escaped cascades of silk damask, overlaid with silver, waves of brocatelle, which a sunbeam covered with luminous dots; while portraits of every period in more or less dull gold frames smiled through their yellow varnish.

The dealer carefully followed me along the narrow passage left open between the piles of furniture, keeping down the fluttering skirts of my coat, and watching my elbows, with the restless attention of an antiquarian and a usurer.

He had a curious face, that dealer; a big skull, polished like marble, with a thin aureole of white hair,

brought out more strongly by the pale salmon colour of his skin, giving him a sham look of patriarchal kindness, which was neutralised, however, by the sparkling of two little yellow eyes that shone in their orbs like two gold coins laid on mercury. The aquiline profile of his nose recalled the Oriental or Jewish type; his thin, slender hands, covered with veins and full of nerves standing out like the strings of a violin, and provided with nails like the claws at the end of a bat's wings, had a most unpleasant senile trembling; but when they lifted some precious object, an onyx cup, a Venetian glass, or a tray of Bohemian crystal, these trembling hands became stronger than steel pincers or lobster's claws. The old rascal had such a thoroughly rabbinical and cabalistic look that he would have burned at the stake three centuries ago merely on account of his appearance.

"Are you not going to buy anything to-day, sir? Here is a Malay creese, the blade of which is waved like a flame. Look at the grooves for the blood to run down; and at these teeth cut the reverse way to tear the entrails as you pull out the weapon. It is a ferocious arm, very characteristic, which would look uncommonly well on your wall. This two-handed sword

is very handsome. It is by Joseph de la Hera. And this great duelling-sword with open-work pearl handle is a superb piece of work."

"No, I have enough weapons and instruments of destruction. I want a statuette, a trifle, for a paper-weight, for I cannot bear those cheap bronzes sold by stationers, which are to be found on every writing-table."

The old gnome, rummaging among his possessions, spread out before me antique bronzes, — or at least claimed to be antique — pieces of malachite, small Hindoo or Chinese jade idols, grotesque incarnations of Brahma or Vishnu, uncommonly well fitted to the not very divine purpose of keeping down newspapers and letters.

I was hesitating between a porcelain dragon covered with warts, its mouth adorned with fangs and tentacles, and a small abominable Mexican fetish representing the god Witziliputzili, when I noticed a lovely foot, which at first I thought must be a fragment of some antique Venus. It had the lovely tawny, ruddy tints that give to Florentine bronze its warm and living tints so preferable to the verdigrised tone of ordinary bronzes, which might easily be mistaken for statues in a state of

putrefaction. Satiny gleams shimmered over its round forms, polished by the loving kisses of twenty centuries; for it unquestionably was of Corinthian brass, a piece of work of the best epoch, perhaps a casting by Lysippus.

"This foot will do for me," said I to the dealer, who looked at me with a sly, ironical glance, as he held it out to allow me to examine it more comfortably.

I was surprised at its lightness. It was not a foot of metal, but of flesh; an embalmed foot, a mummy's foot. On looking closely the grain of the skin and the almost imperceptible mark made by the bandages could be perceived. The toes were small and delicate, with perfect, pure nails, transparent as agate; the great toe, somewhat apart, after the fashion of antiquity, contrasted happily with the direction of the other toes, and gave it a free attitude, the neat aspect of a bird's foot. The sole, scarcely marked by a few faint lines, had evidently never come in contact with the ground, and had trodden only upon the finest matting of Nile reeds, and the softest carpets of panther's-skins.

"Ha! ha! you want the foot of the Princess Hermonthis," said the dealer, with a horrible chuckle, as he fixed upon me his owl-like glance. "Ha! ha!—

for a paper-weight! That is a novel idea; that is an artist's idea. If old Pharaoh had been told that his adored daughter's foot would be used as a paper-weight he would have been astounded, considering that he was having a mountain of granite hollowed out in order to put inside the triple painted and gilded coffin, covered with hieroglyphs, with beautiful paintings representing the judgment of the soul," added the queer little dealer, in a low voice, as if speaking to himself.

"How much will you sell me this fragment of a mummy for?"

"As dear as I can, for it is quite a curiosity. If I had the companion to it, I would not let you have the pair for less than five hundred francs. Pharaoh's daughters are scarce, very scarce."

"I know it; I am aware that it is not very common; but how much do you want? To begin with, I must inform you that my whole wealth amounts to five louis. I shall buy whatever may cost five louis, but nothing more. You might search the back pockets of my vests, and my most secret drawers, you would not find another sou in them."

"Five louis for the foot of Princess Hermonthis! That is very little, very little indeed for an authentic

foot," said the dealer, wagging his head and rolling his eyes. "Well, take it. I will give you the wrapper into the bargain," he added, as he rolled the foot in an old piece of damask. "It is very beautiful genuine Indian damask; never has been dyed; it is strong and sound," he muttered, as he rubbed with his fingers the worn tissue; the force of commercial habit making him praise an object of so little value that even he thought it might as well be given away.

He slipped the gold pieces into a sort of mediæval purse hanging from his belt, repeating, "The foot of Princess Hermonthis for a paper-weight!"

Then, fixing on me his flaming eyes, he said, in a voice as strident as the mewing of a cat that has just swallowed a fish-bone: "Old Pharaoh will not be very pleased; he was very fond of his daughter, the worthy man."

"You talk about him as if you were his contemporary. Old though you are, you do not quite go back to the Pyramids of Egypt," I replied laughingly, as I passed out of the shop.

I returned home, very well satisfied with my purchase, and in order to turn it to account at once, I placed the foot of the divine Princess Hermonthis upon a bundle

of papers, drafts of verses, an undecipherable mosaic of corrections, beginnings of articles, forgotten letters which I had posted in the drawer, — a mistake often committed by absent-minded people. The effect the foot produced was charming, eccentric, and romantic.

Greatly pleased with this embellishment of my table, I went out into the street and walked along with the gravity and the pride that become a man who has over every passer-by he elbows the ineffable advantage of possessing a portion of the Princess Hermonthis, daughter of the Pharaoh. I considered as beneath contempt all those who did not possess, as I did, so notoriously Egyptian a paper-weight, and it appeared to me that the proper business in the life of a sensible man was to have a mummy's foot on his writing-table. Happily, I met some friends, who drew me out of my infatuation. I went to dinner with them, for it would have been difficult for me to dine with myself.

When I returned at night, my head filled with a light, pearly-gray vapour, a faint puff of oriental perfume tickled my olfactory nerves. The warmth of the room had warmed up the natron, bitumen, and myrrh in which the embalmers had dipped the princess's body. It was a sweet and penetrating perfume that had not wholly

evaporated during the lapse of four thousand years; for Egypt dreamed of eternity: its odours have the solidity of granite and last as long.

I soon drank deep of the black cup of sleep. For an hour or two everything remained a blank, and I sank in the sombre waves of forgetfulness and nothingness. Then my intellectual darkness lightened, and dreams began to flutter silently around. The eyes of my soul were opened, and I saw my room such as it actually was. I might have thought myself awake. A strange feeling convinced me that I was asleep and that something curious was about to happen.

The odour of myrrh had grown stronger, and I felt a slight headache, which I very naturally attributed to a number of glasses of champagne which we had drunk to the unknown gods and our future success. I looked round the room with a feeling of expectation that nothing justified. The furniture was in its place, the lamp burning on the table, pleasantly softened by the milky whiteness of the ground-glass globe; the water-colours shimmered under their Bohemian glass; the curtains hung languidly; everything looked serene and quiet.

But after a few moments this peaceful interior seemed to be disturbed. The wood-work cracked furtively, the

log buried in the ashes suddenly shot out a jet of blue flame, and the disks of the coat-hooks looked like metal eyes, attentively watching, as I was, for whatever was about to happen.

By chance I glanced at the table on which I had placed the foot of the Princess Hermonthis. Instead of resting quietly as became a foot embalmed for more than four thousand years, it was moving, contracting, and hopping about the papers like a frightened frog. I could have sworn it was in contact with a voltaic battery. I could quite distinctly hear the sharp sound made by its little heel, as hard as a gazelle's hoof.

I was not quite satisfied with my purchase, for I prefer sedentary paper-weights, and it does not seem natural to me to see feet going about without limbs. Indeed, I began to experience something not unlike fear.

Suddenly I saw a fold of one of my curtains move, and I heard a sound like that made by a person hopping round on one foot. I must confess I turned cold and hot alternately; a strange chill ran up and down my back, and my hair stood up on my head.

The curtains opened, and I saw coming forward the strangest figure imaginable. It was that of a young girl

of a very dark coffee-colour, like Amani the bayadere, of perfect beauty, and recalling the purest Egyptian type. Her almond-shaped eyes were turned up at the corners, and her eyebrows were so black that they showed blue. Her nose was delicately shaped, almost Greek in its outline, and she might have been taken for a Corinthian bronze statue, but that the prominence of the cheek-bones and the somewhat African size of the mouth showed plainly that she belonged to the hieroglyphic race of the banks of the Nile. Her well-shaped arms, slender like those of very young girls, were clasped by metal and glass bracelets; her hair was plaited into little tresses; and on her bosom hung an idol of green clay, which I recognised by the seven-tailed whip as Isis, the conductress of souls; on her brow shone a plate of gold, and some traces of rouge were visible on her copper-coloured cheeks.

As for her costume, it was strange indeed. Imagine a loin cloth of narrow bands covered with black and red hieroglyphics, stiff with bitumen, which seemed to belong to a recently unrolled mummy.

By one of those sudden changes of thought which are so frequent in dreams, I heard the shrill, hoarse voice of the bric-à-brac dealer repeating like a monotonous

refrain the remark he had made in his shop in so enigmatic a tone: —

"Old Pharaoh will not be very much pleased. He was very fond of his daughter, the worthy man."

There was one curious peculiarity which did not contribute to reassure me, — the apparition had but one foot. The other leg was broken off at the ankle.

She went to the table, where the mummy's foot was jumping and quivering with greater rapidity. On reaching it, she leaned upon the edge, and I saw a tear grow in her eyes. Though she said not a word, I could clearly make out her thoughts. She looked at the foot, for it was hers, with an infinitely graceful expression of coquettish sadness, while the foot ran and leaped hither and thither as if moved by steel springs.

Twice or thrice she stretched out her hand to seize it, but failed to do so.

Then there took place between the Princess Hermonthis and her foot, which appeared endowed with a life of its own, a very curious dialogue, in a very ancient Coptic dialect, such as was spoken some thirty centuries ago in the mummy pits of the country of Ser. Luckily that night I happened to know Coptic perfectly well.

Princess Hermonthis said in a sweet voice that vibrated like a crystal bell: —

"Well, my dear little foot, so you are still fleeing from me, though I took good care of you. I washed you with scented water in an alabaster basin; I polished your heel with pumice-stone dipped in palm oil; I cut your nails with golden scissors, and polished them with hippopotamus-teeth; I took care to choose for you painted and embroidered sandals with turned-up points, that made every Egyptian girl envy us. I put on your toes rings representing the sacred scarabæus, and you supported one of the daintiest bodies that a lazy foot could wish for."

The foot replied in a sulky tone: —

"You know very well I do not belong to myself any more. I have been purchased and paid for. The old dealer knew what he was doing. He is still angry with you for refusing to marry him. It is a trick that he is playing upon you. The Arab that broke open your royal coffin in the subterranean well of the Theban Necropolis had been sent by him. He meant to prevent your going to the meeting of the people in darkness in the lower cities. Have you got five gold pieces to buy me back with?"

"Alas, I have not. My gems, my rings, my purses of gold and silver, everything has been stolen from me," replied Princess Hermonthis, with a sigh.

"Princess," I cried then, "I have never unjustly kept back any one's foot. Although you have not got the five louis which I paid for it, I return it to you most willingly. I should be uncommonly sorry to cripple so lovely a person as Princess Hermonthis."

The beautiful Egyptian must have been surprised at the Regency manner and the troubadour tone in which I spoke this speech. She cast upon me a glance full of gratitude, and her eyes lighted up with blue flashes. She took her foot, which allowed itself to be caught this time, like a woman about to put on a shoe, and fitted it very skilfully to her leg, after which she took two or three steps through the room, as if to make certain that she was really no longer a cripple.

"How glad my father will be, for he was so troubled by the mutilation I suffered. The very day I was born he had set a whole nation to work to dig me a tomb deep enough to preserve me intact until the great day when souls are to be weighed in the balances of Amenthi. Come with me to him. He will welcome you, for you have restored my foot to me."

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She . . . fitted it very skilfully to her leg

The proposal struck me as quite natural. I put on a dressing-gown with a great flowered pattern, in which I looked most Pharaoh-like, hastily slipped my feet into a pair of Turkish slippers, and told Princess Hermonthis that I was ready to follow her.

Before leaving, she took from her neck the little figure in green china, and placed it upon the scattered papers that covered my table.

"It is only right," she said, "that I should give you something in place of your paper-weight."

She held out her hand to me. It was soft and cold as a serpent's skin. We were off.

We sped for some time as swift as an arrow through a grayish fluid air in which faintly outlined forms passed to right and left. At one time nothing was visible but sky and water. Presently obelisks began to show up; pylons and long stairs, with sphinxes ranged all the way down, stood out against the horizon. We had arrived.

The princess led me to a mountain of rose granite, in which there was a low, narrow opening which it would have been difficult to distinguish from the cracks in the stone had not a couple of stelæ covered with carvings made it recognisable.

Hermonthis lighted a torch and walked on before me.

We entered corridors cut in the living rock; the walls, covered with panels of hieroglyphs and allegorical processions, must have occupied thousands of men for thousands of years. These corridors, interminably long, ended in square halls, in the centre of which were dug wells. We descended these by means of cramp-irons or of spiral staircases. The wells led into other chambers from which issued other corridors, also adorned with hawks, serpents biting their tails, representations of the mystic tau, pedum, and bari, — a prodigious piece of work which no living eye was to see, endless legends in granite which the dead alone had time to read during eternity.

At last we entered so vast, so enormous, so immense a hall that its limits were invisible. As far as I could see stretched rows of monstrous pillars, between which gleamed limpid stars of yellow light. These brilliant points indicated incalculable depths.

Princess Hermonthis still held my hand, and bowed graciously to the mummies of her acquaintance.

My eyes becoming accustomed to the twilight, I began to discern objects. I saw seated upon thrones the kings of subterranean races. They were tall, dry

old men, wrinkled, parchment-like, black with naphtha and bitumen, wearing the golden pschent, pectorals, and neckplates covered with gems, their eyes staring like those of sphinxes, and they wore long beards, whitened with the snow of centuries. Behind them stood their embalmed peoples, in the stiff, constrained attitudes of Egyptian art, preserving forever the pose prescribed by the hieratic code; behind the peoples, the cats, ibises, and crocodiles of those days, made more mysterious still by being swathed up in bands, mewed, flapped their wings, and chuckled.

Every Pharaoh was there, Cheops, Chephrenes, Psammetichus, Sesostris, Amenoteph; all the swarthy lords of pyramids and pits. On a higher throne sat King Chronos, Xixouthros, who lived in the days of the deluge, and Tubal Cain, who preceded him.

King Xixouthros's beard had grown so much that it had already circled seven times the granite table on which he leaned, dreamy and sleepy.

Farther away, through a dusty vapour, through the mist of eternities, I managed to make out the seventy-two pre-Adamite kings, with their seventy-two peoples, vanished forever.

Princess Hermonthis, having allowed me to enjoy this marvellous spectacle for a few moments, presented me to the Pharaoh, her father, who nodded to me most majestically.

"I have found my foot, I have found my foot!" cried the Princess, clapping her little hands together, with every mark of mad joy. "It is this gentleman who gave it back to me."

The races of Keme, of Nahasi, all the black, bronze, and copper-coloured nations, repeated together: —

"The Princess Hermonthis has found her foot again."

Xixouthros himself was interested. He raised his heavy lids, stroked his moustache, and let fall upon me his glance, laden with centuries.

"By Oms, the dog of Hades, and Tmei, daughter of the Sun and of Truth, you are a fine and worthy fellow," said the Pharaoh, extending towards me his sceptre, ending in a lotus flower. "What will you have for a reward?"

Bold as one is in dreams, in which nothing seems impossible, I asked for the hand of Hermonthis. It struck me that to get the hand in return for the foot was an antithetical reward in pretty good taste.

The Pharaoh opened wide his glass eyes, amazed at my joke and my request.

"What is your country, and what is your age?"

"I am a Frenchman, and I am twenty-seven years old, venerable Pharaoh."

"Twenty-seven years! and he proposes to wed Princess Hermonthis, who is thirty centuries old," cried out together all the thrones and all the circles of nations.

Hermonthis alone did not think my request at all improper.

"If you were only two thousand years old," answered the old king, "I would willingly give you the Princess; but the disproportion is too great; and then, we must have for our daughters husbands that can last. You people do not know how to preserve yourselves. The last, brought here scarcely fifteen centuries ago, are now nothing but a handful of ashes. See, my own flesh is hard as basalt, my bones are like bars of steel. I shall see the last day of the world with the same body and the same face as I had when alive. My daughter Hermonthis will endure longer than a bronze statue. By that time the wind will have scattered the last grain of your dust, and Isis herself, who managed to find the

pieces of Osiris, would be hard put to it to reconstruct your frame. See how vigorous I am yet, and how strong my arms are," said he, as he shook hands with me in English fashion, so that he cut my fingers with my rings.

He squeezed my hand so hard that I awoke, and perceived my friend Alfred, pulling me by the arm, and shaking me to make me get up.

"Look here, you confounded sleeper, shall I have to take you out into the street and to set off fireworks at your ears? It is past noon. Have you forgotten that you promised to call for me to go to see Aguado's Spanish paintings?"

"Good gracious, I had forgotten all about it," replied I, as I dressed. "We shall go at once. I have the invitation here on my table."

As I spoke, I stepped forward to take up the card; but judge of my astonishment when, instead of the mummy's foot which I had bought the night before, I saw the little figure of green clay put in its place by the Princess Hermonthis.